The LAST of the KNICKERBOCKERS

HERMAN K. VIELÉ

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A COMEDY ROMANCE

BY

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"GIVE ME FACES AND STREETS."
—WALT WHITMAN

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H. K. V.

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CHAPTER I

SILHOUETTES

The parlor windows of the Ruggles mansion look out on Kenilworth Place across the railings of an iron balcony, wherein the sinewy tentacles of an old wistaria vine are interwoven and interlaced. There is a street lamp directly in front of the house, and often at dusk, before the shades are drawn, a rectangle of yellow light is thrown on either wall within, with the pattern of Nottingham lace curtains, and the moving silhouettes of leaves. Then, for a time, the long, high, shadowy room takes on some measure of its ancient dignity; for a time the heavy cornices and lofty doors of red mahogany become once more significant of grace and beauty, which things, expressed in hieroglyphics at the best, change only in their symbols.

It is late afternoon and late November and in Kenilworth Place a fine, cold rain driving from Broadway foretells good luck for those who are to dine at home. For already upon the balcony

and the vine, and along the area railings, and on the bare, black branches of the one ailanthus tree the first fringes of winter icicles are beginning to form, and passers-by step gingerly or take short, cautious slides.

Within, the squares of yellow light are bright upon the walls, and the Nottingham lace patterns well defined. Also a most unflattering pattern of Miss Alida Van Wandeleer, who is at the window.

Alida is aware of the opening of a red mahogany door, and rightly supposes her godmother to have come into the parlor. She even fancies herself aware of a sudden breath of the foggy outdoor atmosphere entering at the same time, and the faint suggestion of black dye, inseparably associated in her mind with Miss Caroline De Wint. But knowing her own conversational chances to be small when her mother and Cousin Caroline meet after several hours' separation, she does not leave her place behind the hanging curtains. Besides, Van Wandeleer traditions do not encourage self-assertion in the young, and Alida is proud of her reverence for tradition, when at home.

"Josephine," began Miss De Wint, severely, "why don't you ring for lights? This room is as dark as a furniture-van, and as full of footstools. One cannot take a step without kicking something."

"Oh, Caroline," a voice rejoined irrelevantly, a carefully modulated voice no less agreeable because the R's were just a trifle indistinct, "I have been trying to recall who Serena Laurens was engaged to before she married Schepmoes."

Mrs. Valentine Van Wandeleer reclined in a low arm-chair before a high black marble mantelpiece, in whose depths the single eye of an expiring fire waxed dim and glassy. In profile against the window her clear cut features beneath a stiff diminutive widow's cap suggested the portrait, in black paper, of somebody's great-grandmother, taken on a silver wedding anniversary. But from the ribbon collar downward to the tip of a pointed slipper the outline was distinctly modern, and the gesture employed to raise a lorgnette to her eyes was as contemporaneous as it was unnecessary.

"What put her in your head?" demanded Miss De Wint, alluding to Serena. She had with little difficulty found the massive sofa, drawn across two folding doors—also of red mahogany—and now sat tentatively thereupon, as one who has not far to go sits in a public vehicle, her hands thrust in a marten muff, from which protruded several packages.

"Her daughter called this afternoon," explained the lady of the chair. "Rather a pretty girl, I thought, if her eyes were not so close

together, but''—Mrs. Van Wandeleer lowered her voice discreetly—''not at all the sort of girl I should like Alida to see much of. It seems she supports herself. How, heaven only knows! And her mother is in a Home for Gentlewomen. Fancy Serena in a Home for Gentlewomen!''

''I can't,'' responded Miss De Wint. ''Who else was here?''

''Lucy De Voe came early and stayed ever so long.''

''Poor, dear Lucy! I suppose she was, as usual, most depressing.''

''Yes; she has gone to live in Brooklyn, and of course—'' Mrs. Van Wandeleer shook her head and sighed, significantly.

''Yes, I suppose so.''

''I only had a dollar, and that was in small change.''

''Poor, dear Lucy!'' said Miss De Wint again; ''they used to be so comfortable before her father died, and the Guardian and Trustee company took charge of her affairs.''

''Yes, she is like the rest of us, only worse off,'' the other sighed, dejectedly. ''Last quarterday she did not even get one-half of one per cent. Some mortgage turned out badly, I believe, and of course it happened to be hers. Next time it may be yours or mine.''

The passenger upon the sofa did not reply at

once, but stroked her marten muff reflectively. Through an open register a Celtic voice ascended from below in song, and with it came the faint first fumes of soup. After a moment Miss De Wint remarked: "I've found a place where they clean gloves for eight cents a pair."

It was a practice with Caroline De Wint to dismiss unpleasant topics by an announcement sufficiently startling for the purpose, and she boasted of having cured seasickness with the simple sentence, "Guess who's dead!" In an extreme case of marital infelicity she had not hesitated to kill the Bishop.

But the Van Wandeleer afternoon at home had had its brighter moments, as presently appeared. Mrs. Norris had called, and other of the below Fourteenth Street colony. And Colonel Vanderlyn, who told of his Long Island gold mine while eating all the bread and butter sandwiches; and old Doctor Roorda, who was most amusing, though more disgracefully untidy than ever.

"And of course," concluded Mrs. Van Wandeleer, "there were a number of Alida's friends. New people, whose names mean absolutely nothing, and frightfully overdressed."

"And young men?" inquired Alida's godmother, with interest.

"Oh, dear no," replied Alida's mother; "new young men have no time to call. They are in

Wall Street, making deals and things. A pleasant outlook for their wives and children."

"When one thinks of the Guardian and Trustee company, and the Home for Gentlewomen," began Miss De Wint—but even the pleasure of differing with Josephine brought no warmth to a defense of the new people.

Meanwhile Alida, impatient perhaps of prolonged neglect, took up the burden of the register.

"There's always something doing
When O'Malley's at the bat,"

she hummed softly behind the curtains.

"Alida," said her mother, "do ring for Mary to light the gas, she seems to have forgotten it."

"Mary is busy just at present," replied Alida, meekly.

"How can you possibly know what she is doing?"

"I saw the fishman go down the area steps five minutes ago, and Mary is attentive to the fishman."

"Oh, my dear child!" protested Miss De Wint, in tolerant reproof.

"I wish you would not notice her," the other whispered; "she has been lunching with those Brisbanes again, and I'm sure they teach her dreadful things."

"If they are not proper people for her to know—" began the godmother.

"Oh, no, I should not go as far as that," the mother interrupted, hurriedly.

"Which burner shall I light, mother?" inquired Alida, who had drawn an ottoman beneath the chandelier and was prepared to mount upon it. "The one that wheezes or the one that spits?"

"I told you to ring for the servant," replied her mother, icily.

"Fudge!" said the lady on the sofa, with asperity, for it was a conviction with her, as old as Alida herself, that only through an oversight had Providence permitted motherhood to Josephine Van Wandeleer. "Come here and sit beside me, child, and tell me all about those Brisbane people. How long have you known them, where did you meet them, and who are they, anyhow?"

Alida dutifully took the unoccupied end of the long sofa.

"Oh, Bessie and I have been friends ever since last spring," she said, "and I suppose that is why her father and mother like me. You see they have only lived here a few years and have not many friends."

"They are tremendously rich," suggested Mrs. Van Wandeleer, to supplement her daughter's meager facts.

"Yes, mother, regular plutocrats, but not so long ago he was just a country editor."

"That was respectable at least," graciously commented Miss De Wint. "And what was she?"

"I think she was a Bean," replied Alida.

"A what?"

"A Bean," repeated Alida, with pronounced composure, "or a Beed, I'm not quite certain which."

"It doesn't make much difference," sniffed her godmother. "Did you have a pleasant lunch, or did they begin with terrapin, and shriek like locomotives?"

"No, it was just like any other lunch—I helped to order it; but I should have liked it better if every one had not spent the summer abroad and taken it for granted that everybody else went over every year."

"To think of it," sighed Miss De Wint. "Why, Josephine, when we were girls, Europe was the finishing touch to one's education. Then children were prepared for travel as they were for confirmation, and I'm sure it did them much more good."

"Oh, Cousin Caroline!" protested Alida, unjustly scenting sacrilege, but her sponsor went on unheeding.

"Before I went abroad with papa and mama we spoke French at table for six months. Just for the literature, of course; nice girls never so

much as looked at foreigners. Dear papa disliked them all, and used to speak of Burke as the Beerage. I wonder what he would have called the exotics in society to-day."

"Why, the Steerage, I suppose," suggested Alida. For this she was rewarded with an approving pat, and the appearance of Mary entering with belated energy, made further conversation for the moment unadvisable.

"Murder!" exclaimed that menial in the darkness. But it was a fashion of speech rather than a note of alarm, and betokened nothing worse than sudden contact with the misplaced ottoman.

"Do try to be more quiet," admonished Mrs. Van Wandeleer.

"Sure you'd holler yourself if it was your leg."

"Please light the gas and go away at once."

"Faith, I'll not intrude me company where it's not wanted," returned the handmaiden, and the closing door announced her words to be no empty vaunt.

"Oh, this is too humiliating!" cried Mrs. Van Wandeleer, erect and tremulous. "Caroline, I do not feel that I can remain in this wretched house another day."

"Josephine, you are a fool," said Miss De Wint, as one who recalls a truism. "You speak to other people's servants as though they were your own and you had a hundred. You forget

that things are not with any of us as they used to be."

"I hope I shall never forget my position, or what is due to it."

"Fudge!"

"You may remain here if you like."

"I shall," said Miss De Wint, "and so will you. I have no doubt Bella Ruggles will, if you ask it, dismiss Ann at once."

"Mary," corrected Alida.

"How long since?" inquired Cousin Caroline.

"Monday, I think."

"If Bella Ruggles had one atom of dignity her servants would not be so uniformly careless and impertinent," lamented Mrs. Van Wandeleer.

"Poor Bella," Miss De Wint rejoined; "if she had had an atom of common sense when Ruggles offered himself she would not to-day be keeping a boarding-house, and we should, I suppose, be living—"

"At Italian tables d'hôte," put in Alida, seeing her sponsor hesitate upon the brink of degradation, "like the Café Chianti, in grandfather's old house, where they have music and charge only fifty cents, including wine."

Cousin Caroline stroked her muff in silence, and Mrs. Van Wandeleer, leaning forward, poked the fire, which promptly yielded up the ghost.

Clearly the suggestion had not been a happy one, and Alida, with a view to mending matters, waited awhile before inquiring, thoughtfully: "Mother, how many of our ancestors are buried in St. Mark's?"

"Four," replied her mother, sadly.

"Six," corrected Miss De Wint. "The first De Wint there was Peterus, you know."

"We should not count him, Caroline; we are not at all sure that grave is really his."

"Then whose else could it possibly be?" demanded Miss De Wint, which argument, being unanswerable, was to her mind conclusive, and Peterus, dead two centuries and more, became a living issue.

In life he had been a mighty miller and braved the wilds of Union Square till the Indians burned his mill and laid waste his bowerie—the prototype of a line of windmill builders whose works were ashes.

Alida privately held more with the Van Wandeleers, one Valentine in particular, Justice and Farmer of Taxes, who owned an interest in the good ship Golden Ox, but she found it policy to burn her joss sticks on the graves of the De Wints.

"Isn't it odd we have so few relations," she remarked, as the conversation grew securely genealogical, "when the directory is teeming

with us?—undertakers, stevedores, ministers, and salt fish."

"Many of the early settlers had good reason to change their names," explained her godmother, "and naturally they chose distinguished ones. The laws about such things were rather lax."

"Yes, of course," Alida assented, but the tone betrayed uneasiness. For discussion headed now directly toward the vaults of Tiffany's where lay the Tankard and the Spoon, heirlooms whose final disposition was ever a source of anxiety to Cousin Caroline.

"I'm going to light the gas," she suddenly announced, "and show you my new dress."

When the first jet from hissing like an adder, had been calmed into reluctant service, Alida lighted another and another, till the circle was complete and hung above her head a luster of pendant incandescent prisms, vibrating gently and giving out faint tinkling notes. About the ancient drawing-room a thousand shabbinesses, invisible by day, became apparent; dull, patternless places on the flowered carpet; frayed edges on the red rep furniture; stains on the ceiling, and on the ponderous frames of family portraits the scars of many mendings. In the midst of it Alida, standing on the ottoman, posed openly.

"Dear me, child," cried Miss De Wint, "how well you look!"

The effect had not been badly managed, but Alida needed neither contrast nor the accidents of rich attire. At twenty she asked nothing of the universe but light. Youth and health she had, and an abounding love of life; and for the rest some dozen master strokes of line, that nature knows so well and guards so meanly, have made her what she is. Those who have called her more than pretty have had her hair in mind; and as she stands now against the red mahogany of the door, this melts into its background as though a brush had drawn the tones together. Only the small unruly cowlick on her forehead mercifully saves it from being beautiful.

Alida, neither tall nor short, nor dark nor fair, has yet the gift, intangible as beauty, of putting those who vary from her standard at a disadvantage. Also another gift, intangible as truth; the aura which is the heritage of women born between the Three Rivers. One meeting her anywhere upon the planet would say at once, New York. The carriage of her head would be enough—her step—the buttoning of a glove—to bring before the eyes some reach of sunny avenue; an arch, blue in the distance; twin spires, rosy in the sun; the red brick fabric of a newer Babel, laughing at tradition, daring art to follow. And such a

one, if blessed with the sublime provincialism that marks the metropolitan, must feel a slight contraction in the throat.

The dress, in color that of faded oak leaves, with touches here and there of turquoise blue and silver, was in its way a marvel, breathing the latest cry of fashion, even the cry half formed upon the lips of fashion. It had arrived that morning in time for Bessie Brisbane's luncheon. Madame Bazet had had it thrown upon her hands, and begged Miss Van Wandeleer to accept it as a token of esteem, and in memory of Felise, who had done her mother's hair when dinners in her grandfather's old house might not be had for fifty cents. Perhaps, if any one should chance to ask, Miss Van Wandeleer would not withhold the maker's name—*mais ce n'est pas de quoi, chère mademoiselle.* It was through such ventures that the worthy Gaul acquired real estate in the Borough of the Bronx.

Alida's dress is paid for ten times over, but she does not know it. Neither does she know that at the Brisbane luncheon she set afloat a ship of dire bewilderment for Arnold's clerks.

"What shade is that, my dear?" her hostess had called across the table; and Alida, taking little thought, replied, "Oh, I should call it candle-moth."

"Of course," replied the other, and there arose twelve who called it "candle-moth."

"You had better take it off," said Cousin Caroline, when the exhibition was at an end. "It must be nearly dinner time."

"Oh, I shall keep it on for dinner," Alida answered, lightly. "It will annoy Mrs. Van Gaasbeck so, especially if her son should speak to me by any chance."

"But those stupid servants so often forget that gravy is a liquid," began Mrs. Van Wandeleer, feebly.

"Josephine, my dear, why can't you let the poor child have a little pleasure?" demanded Cousin Caroline, who had been about to raise a like objection. "I'm going up to dress, and unless you mean to wear your best cap in honor of Grace Van Gaasbeck, I suggest that you come, too."

"Alida," said Mrs. Van Wandeleer, as she left the room, "if I have dropped anything, please pick it up."

CHAPTER II

IN BORDERLAND

Alida, alone with the Ruggles family portraits, looked about her and found their company distinctly dull. Above the square, fat-legged piano Chancellor De Vos, who had in life been Mrs. Ruggles's honored sire, held a dull book half open, threateningly; over the chimney-piece a Lady with a Rose, attributed to Sully, pleaded for varnish. Elsewhere, sundry gentlemen in stocks appeared to strangle, and in the single landscape of the Hudson River School, the sloops lay hopelessly becalmed. In the Brisbane house on Park Avenue there were electric lights and flowers and pictures that laughed and said amusing things. But not for a moment did it occur to Miss Van Wandeleer that Bessie could be envied.

By and by, after dinner, the Ruggles parlor would be duller still. Then seven elderly ladies, each on her own pre-empted claim of faded rep, would crochet and count stitches, and recall enchanting evenings glorified by time. And when the prismatic chandelier had done its work of partial asphyxiation they would yawn dis-

creetly and go off reminiscently to bed. Then Alida, who had refused a seat in Mrs. Norris's box because she accepted but one in three of Mrs. Norris's invitations, would also go to bed, at half-past ten. Bessie Brisbane, at that hour, would have but to rub one of her many rings and almost anything might happen. But not for all the rings between the Marble Arch and Murray Hill would Miss Van Wandeleer admit her lot in life the less desirable.

Outside the window the freezing rain still fell. But now the sidewalks were undulating with umbrellas and noisy with clamor of many tongues let loose. For it was quitting time in the workshops, and in the streets beginning time, and to a million the morning of a little day of conscious individuality. Alida always watched this ebb draw out to east and west with a healthy, human curiosity, and sometimes with an interest that grew intensely personal. Between her and the great procession there was each evening but the thickness of a plate of glass; between her and it on quarterdays, one-half of one per cent. And sometime it might stretch a pace to make room for her. She had no misgivings that Manhattan could refuse the Van Wandeleers a share of marketable beaver skins should they require it; and besides the people in the street did not appear unhappy.

Opposite a girl clinging to a railing shrieked in simulated terror while another urged her on to feats of daring on the icy flags. Then two young men stood still to offer counsel and advice. When presently the four went laughing on their way together, Alida pressed her nose against the pane to watch them out of sight. A boy with evening papers wrapped in black tarpaulin did a thriving trade, and between transactions took large bites from a pie. A man climbed the lamp post to light a cigarette.

Now and then some scrap of conversation became distinct, indifferent jokes about the weather.

"I'm going down to Coney Island." "Ain't you afraid of mosquitos?" Admonitions to walk faster. "Hurry up!" "Come along!" Hurry for what? Come along where? No matter; hurry! Come! Under the rain and sleet and the ceaseless countermarch of black umbrellas beat the brave heart of the city; and Alida, with the sense of living at the source that is the burgher's birthright, felt the thrill of it, its great imperishable hope, its infinity of possibility.

Turning from the window she went to the piano, fat-legged and square, beneath the portrait of Chancellor De Vos. The keys were yellow that had once been white, and of the black more than one remained permanently down as

though the ghost of an old-time mazurka lingered. As she drew her finger across the board the sound was not unlike that of a harp, not by any means a well-tuned harp, but sound is only untrained music, and music only harnessed sound; and both are better company than silence when one is young. Alida gave the stool a twist.

"There's always something doing
When O'Malley's at the bat,"

she sang softly, though with spirit.

Her music, which came by nature as she said, made up in naïve audacity for many technical defects, and the song was in a way a reflex of the crowded sidewalk, and in a way a protest against Chancellor De Vos.

After O'Malley came a Coon song, an idyl of Sullivan Street and Seventh Avenue, of razors and ragtime, and staccato imitations of the banjo. Though the humor that impelled it was of short duration there had been time while the selection lasted—so Alida reflected later—for any number of persons to have come into the room unheeded.

"Oh li'l lamb out in de col',
De Mastah call you to de fol'.
O li'l lamb!"

Alida sang now almost inaudibly, for she was singing to herself, as a child sings to itself or to a doll.

"O Shepud I's a-comin' quick—
O li'l lamb!"

When the song was ended she played the refrain again and once again more softly, pretending, with one small bronze foot upon the pedal of the old piano, that some dusky singer passed slowly out of hearing, passed out of sight through cypress alleys where moss hung trailing overhead; across a bridge and on toward the quarters.

"O li'l lamb!"

Then presently some words came to her that she had found in the corner of a Sunday paper and set to an odd accompaniment of her own invention. A critic would have found little to commend in either verse or music, but happily one does not always sing for critics.

"And have you been to Borderland?
Its country lies on either hand
Across the river I-forget.
One crosses by a single stone,
So narrow one must cross alone,
And all around its waters fret,
The laughing river, I-forget.

"Beneath the trees of Borderland,
One seems to know and understand,
Across the river I-forget,
All languages of men and birds,
And all the sweet, unspoken words
One ever missed are murmured yet
By that kind river, I-forget.

"Some day together, hand in hand,
I'll take you there to Borderland,
Beyond the river I-forget.
Some day, when all our dreams come true—
One kiss for me and one for you—
We'll watch the red suns sink and set
Across the river I-forget."

Somewhere in the last line Alida became conscious of a pair of eyes regarding the back of her head. But there is a doubt as to whether this occult perception followed or came after a slight cough from the direction of the sofa, so nearly did the two occur together.

Alida waited for the first cold chill of surprise, annoyance, and chagrin to pass, then turning slowly upon the piano stool, composed herself to encounter any presence whatsoever, from the shade of Chancellor De Vos to the actuality of a misplaced telegraph boy.

But that which she encountered was naturally the thing for which she had been least prepared; a man; a stranger; apparently young, undoubtedly good looking, and presumably in the flesh, though for the moment he made no effort to establish the fact. In a corner of the red rep sofa he had the air of one who had discovered its possibilities for comfort, but the shoulders of a long grey overcoat still glistened with the outdoor wet, as did also a soft felt hat upon his knees. His trousers were turned up at the bottoms, and

his boots, which were bright considering the weather, had noticeably heavy soles. Further, without directly looking, Alida gathered an impression of dark hair cut shorter than prevailing taste demanded, and a loosely tied cravat that might have distressed an observant sister.

It was probably a matter of seconds that they sat thus facing one another, but it seemed much longer. The gas buzzed pertinaciously, and gave forth intermittent flares and squeaks; somewhere upstairs a door was slammed; outside the paper boy proclaimed a doubtful extra.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," spoke the young man, rising, as he appeared to remember suddenly that an explanation on his part might reasonably be expected, "but—but—you are not Miss Caroline De Wint?"

"No," replied Alida, with much dignity, "I am not. Do you want to see Miss De Wint?"

"I am not quite sure," he answered, and the uncertainty seemed odd in one who must have given himself some trouble to come at all.

"Does Cousin Caroline know you are here?" Alida asked, which was, of course, a stupid mistake, and one she was glad the stranger did not notice.

"I'm not sure, but I scarcely think so," he replied. "The servant ushered me in here, and then I am afraid she fell down a flight of stairs."

"How long ago was that?" she asked him, coldly.

"Oh, just a minute," he assured her, but she knew his sense of time must be inaccurate; and it was a relief to have him add simply, "You were finishing something when I came in, and then you sang that song by Dunbar, and then another I have never heard before."

He spoke without affectation, as one conscious of no embarrassment in a situation for which neither could be held responsible; and Alida, whose good opinion of her own judgment was unfaltering, decided that it would be the part of dignity not to leave the room at once. Though the stranger apparently stood not at all in awe of her, there had been nothing so far in his manner to justify an abrupt withdrawal. His desire to set himself right before going further was impersonal, open, and undisguised, and his unspoken appeal to her generosity might have been directed to Cousin Caroline herself, though possibly with less success.

"The last was not by any one in particular," said Miss Van Wandeleer, composedly, and rising without undue haste she took a step toward the door. "I will tell Miss De Wint that you are here," she added; "she is dressing for dinner and will be coming down directly."

The gentleman inclined his head.

"Thank you," he said. "I had forgotten that it might be dinner-time."

"Yes, we dine rather early," said Alida, with the fatal fondness of the young for imparting information, "on account of one lady who is very old."

"In that case, perhaps I had better call again."

"Oh no, it can't be later now than six, and Miss De Wint would be so sorry—"

As Alida left the meaningless formula unfinished he rejoined, "I'm not so sure of that; in fact I'm not sure at all that she is the Miss De Wint I am looking for. You see I only happened to find her name on a pamphlet as the secretary for some charity."

"Yes, she is secretary for ever so many charities."

"This one was, I think, a society for the aid of escaped convicts."

Alida has been accused of receiving this intelligence with a cry of apprehension and alarm. What she said in truth was only, "That society is for the aid of *released* convicts"; making the correction with too slight an emphasis to excuse what followed.

"Oh, really!" he protested, in accents of distress, then looking straight into her eyes he laughed—laughed openly and frankly, laughed

as no one has a right to laugh except on old acquaintance. And Alida—well, she was twenty and he was twenty-five. And there are moments when the innate folly of the race forgets its centuries of repression; when the old, mad, irresponsible cave man breaks out to caper and leap again.

"But it was funny, wasn't it?" he said, becoming suddenly grave.

"I do not think so in the least," she answered, blushing furiously, and contending with a nervous inclination to laugh again. But the other came to her assistance.

"Would you mind telling me if Miss De Wint is what one might call fierce?" he asked, with a startling irrelevance worthy of Cousin Caroline herself.

"Fierce?"

"Yes, unapproachable I mean. I want to ask her about some one she may have known long ago. Do you think she would mind telling me?"

"Not in the least, if she had liked the person, and very much if she had not," replied Alida, frankly.

"This person may have been a near relation," he was beginning to explain, when Alida interrupted.

"I should not advise you even to hint at that," she said, with friendly warning. "Cousin Caro-

line has never had a relative except my mother and myself."

"You are quite sure of that, of course," he ventured, doubtfully.

"Oh yes, I know all about our family."

"Perhaps she may have been only a school friend," he speculated, partly to himself.

"At Fulham Priory?" Alida asked, becoming interested.

"Is that a school?" he asked in turn.

"It used to be," she answered, "but it burned down long ago." In dismissing Cousin Caroline as a promising source of information, she realized now that she had assumed certain responsibilities, and accepted them.

"Won't you sit down?" she said, with dignity; "and please don't take that little chair, it's not reliable."

As they once more faced each other from piano stool and sofa she told him that Fulham Priory had been the only school attended by Caroline De Wint, and he performed some feat of mental arithmetic regarding dates.

"They don't come out at all," he said, with disappointment. "I must be upon the wrong track altogether. It is very kind of you to tell me this. I must have bored you frightfully."

"I am afraid I have not helped you very much," she said.

"No," he assented, "everything I want to know about happened before you were born. There are a thousand people who could tell me in a dozen words, but the trouble is I don't know where to find them. You are the only person I have spoken to in New York, except the clerk at the Holland House, and he was most official."

The pause that followed might have been embarrassing had not his eyes continued to include her in the puzzle, and when he spoke again it was with a distinct advance toward confidence.

"You remarked just now," he said, "that you knew all about your family. Now I know nothing about mine except that I had a grandfather, with whom I quarreled ten years ago because he would not tell me my own name."

"Really!" cried Alida, opening wide her eyes at this unheard of state of things.

The visitor nodded an affirmation. "That's about the size of it," he said.

"And you thought Cousin Caroline could help you?"

"Yes, I thought there was a chance. I used to study from an old school book in which the name of Caroline De Wint was scribbled on a fly-leaf. I have not even got the book any longer, but there may have been some connection. I thought she might remember losing a geography."

"But surely you could ask her that!"

"Yes," he assented, seriously, "but to tell the truth you have made me a little afraid of Miss De Wint. Perhaps she valued the geography, you know, and I am in no position to defend our title to it."

"I am sure my cousin would be very willing to tell you everything she knows," returned Alida, a trifle uneasily it must be admitted, for the problem of making the interview convincing to her elders was beginning to obtrude itself. The visitor, detecting the note, rose instantly to his feet.

"I hope you will not think it very strange," he said, "if I defer my call on Miss De Wint. You know one pictures things so differently from the reality."

Alida did not answer, but her face looking up to him expressed a faint interrogation. Whatever the "everything" he had pictured might mean, she was conscious of being herself the reality, and the rôle was not a wholly novel one.

"I have no right to impose on you a moment longer," he went on, "but I should hate to be considered a mysterious idiot. Please ask me anything that occurs to you—even the name of my asylum."

"I should like to know just who you expected

to find here," she replied, with a little laugh, which he was quick to answer as he said:

"Oh, I had fancied a nice little old lady with a cat or so, and I planned to make friends with the cats, and hoodwink their mistress with a small subscription—for the convicts. I was not prepared to bring up suddenly against a social system."

"Indeed!" returned the social system, noncommittally.

"Yes," he continued, looking at her steadily, "in spite of undeserved consideration, I find I have got hold of the wrong end of the string. One can't start in New York as one would in Oro City."

"And where is Oro City?" asked Alida. "I don't know much about geography."

"Oro is somewhere in the Rocky Mountains," he replied, instructively. "Its leading product is gold-bearing quartz—which is shipped elsewhere to be refined."

"How very interesting," said Alida.

"Very," he assented, "especially for the quartz. It needs only a little crushing and a little beating to become quite presentable. Perhaps you will kindly say to Miss De Wint that I shall do myself the honor of calling later."

"Yes, I will tell her," said Alida; "and shall I say when she may expect you?"

"I am afraid it will not be very soon," he an-

swered, gravely; "the honor of my family is involved in that geography, but I have first to find the family. You will agree with me, I know, that family is the one element most essential."

"It is an element that many people do very well without," she returned, with spirit, for she suspected him of making fun of her.

"Oh yes, in Oro," he rejoined; "but Oro is two thousand miles from here."

Before Alida could reply, almost before she was aware of what she did, he had held out his hand and she had given him hers.

"Good night," he said, retaining it an imperceptible moment, "good night, and thank you for your very great kindness—in not calling the police."

When he turned at the threshold she was sitting with her eyes upon the yellow keys, and she did not raise them till the red mahogany door had closed and after it the outer door, more heavily, so heavily as to send a tinkling tremor through the prismatic chandelier.

CHAPTER III

A DISH OF OLIVES

The evening meal in the household of Ruggles was piously held by those admitted to its privileges to differ from the travesty of dinner commonly associated with weekly payment, and to maintain, in point of company at least, the honorable traditions of Chancellor De Vos's mahogany.

In the dining-room, red flock paper, paneled with strips of gilded moulding, made a pleasant background; the rigid hangings were of the same cheerful hue, and opposing mirrors multiplied the candles to infinity. The frescoed ceiling symbolized the seasons; the mantel, night and morning in Carrara. A lion of Lucerne died on a yellow marble clock between two men at arms who carried gas jets, and above the Sheffield domes upon the sideboard hung the seductive portrait of a melon. But for a stain or so suggesting water pipes, one might have fancied one's self back in the old, forgotten city that shouted for Kossuth and built a monument to General Worth.

At one end of the long table Bella herself presided; her white hair rolled high in the manner of Mrs. Judge Van Horn of blessed memory;

her dark, bright eyes alert with hospitable solicitude, and her weak lips parted for whatever platitude occasion might demand. From time to time she raised a plump, white hand in signal to Mary in violent action and an aged colored man cruising upon the offing, or again sent wireless messages to Mr. Bella Ruggles, who facing her peered timidly from behind a soup tureen or roast or other savory barricade. Between the host and hostess ranged the ten of fortune's favorites who shared the feast.

It was the moment between courses when olives assume importance, and Mrs. Ruggles, selecting for herself the least attractive fruit, dispatched the heavy little silver dish upon its circuit.

"Mr. Volkert, may I offer you an olive?" she inquired, persuasively—and Mr. Volkert helped himself to three.

He was a young gentleman whose deep set eyes, high forehead, and smoothly shaven face gave promise of so much greater interest than it was in their owner's power to fulfill that he had wisely, or unwisely, abandoned the attempt. Contenting himself with externals he wore broad collars and loose cravats, which told against him in the offices of Barrows, Clatworthy & Sill, wherein he was believed to study law; and he sometimes practiced on the flute, in privacy if not

in secret. Edward Volkert owed his present honorable seat to conversational tendencies occasionally calling for repression, and at twenty-one he found this a distinction.

Beyond him—"What! olives? Thank you, no"—sat his grandmother—the repression was complete—a lady of great size and defective hearing, who was also "Grandma Epps," by courtesy, to all her friends.

Next in order came Alida, to-night a candle-moth among worthy beetles; and then her mother, and Miss Caroline De Wint. This brought the olive dish to Mr. Ruggles, who hastily sent it upon its homeward way by grace of Bella Junior at his right.

Bella Junior, or Bell, sole daughter of the house, performed the service grudgingly, and with an expression of aggressive discontent which often marred her really pretty face. She had refrained from olives, though regarding them with no distaste, and added thereby another to her tale of wrongs.

Bell's leading grievance was the boarding-house, to which her calculations gave a rental value that might well suffice for three in independence somewhere out of town. And knowing nothing of mortgages this wrong beset her night and day, making her almost plain and spiteful before her time. Though she and Alida Van

Wandeleer had been classmates at Madame Brown's, Bell looked already several years the senior.

"Miss Deusenbury, do you care for these things?" she asked, disparagingly.

"They look delightful," replied her neighbor, who was courtesy itself.

Everybody knows who the Deusenburys are. Miss Hannah was of the less prominent River branch, but she had been a beauty, and when the Prince danced twice with her at that wonderful old Academy ball, people said all sorts of amusing things. But beauty and princes and the things they bring were shadowy now to the mistress of *belles-lettres*, and out of the class-room her talk was of Henry Esmond, though her dreams may still have been of Vanity Fair.

Beside the teacher was her friend Miss Toll, who on Sundays wrought mightily at Faith Church mission, and occupied the secular hours in filling out little cards and sorting little packages. Her knowledge of the clergy list was truly remarkable, and she rarely went abroad without coming back in some one's else carriage.

Two guests remain and—the olive will have served its peaceful purpose—Mrs. Bruyn Van Gaasbeck and her son, the doctor.

To know Mrs. Van Gaasbeck was to be aware that she had tasted sorrow, though to look

upon her only, the thought might not at once occur. But one could not be long in her company—the doctor being absent—without an inkling of her story. The late Bruyn, who had been a bear, and synonymously, a beast and brute, had for years kept the eyes of society upon successive antics until his final exit with a shameless leading lady. There were details for a shelf of novels between the wedding at Old St. Thomas and the sailing of the Bothnia, but the tale, grown hard by endless repetitions, evoked tears no longer, and the woman who had coined her heart in phrases no longer looked for them. Tall, erect, and stately, her toilets were the admiration of the table, and if behind her back unkind things were whispered, there was always some one to say, "But at least she is devoted to her son."

Providence had given Doctor Van Gaasbeck, as a protection doubtless against leading ladies, an abnormally large head, thin reddish hair, and a white skin enlivened by many freckles, but his smile was that of an apostle, and those who took the trouble to listen to his infrequent words found them direct and to the point. Further he had two distinguishing characteristics—a pair of very thick eyeglasses which at certain angles magnified his eyes to a startling size, and secondly, the faint though unmistakable smell of iodoform, in which disinfectant he had an abiding faith.

Unlike the other guests the doctor did not sleep in the house, but occupied a transmutable sofa in his office, the reception-room of an English basement, a few blocks farther north. There Richard Van Gaasbeck passed all of his days and all of his evenings, and there, his repute for financial leniency being even greater than his renown for skill, he received a numerically flattering stream of patients.

This arrangement of the table, though it might seem to give the hostess an undue share of male society, had not been reached without much careful thought and successive changes, all tending to remove Mrs. Van Gaasbeck from draughts, to which she was highly sensitive, and her son from the proximity of the younger women, to whom he appeared ungallantly indifferent.

It was early in the repast, and conversation flitting fitfully from theme to theme, poised for a moment doubtful where to light. The pause was any one's for the asking, and Mr. Volkert took it.

"Hello Central!" he remarked, rather louder than was necessary, bending forward to catch Alida's eye across his kinswoman's ample breast; "how are things up your way?"

She had known Edward Volkert all her life, she had been engaged to him at ten, but she had outgrown him long ago.

"I am very well, thank you," replied Central, nodding tolerantly back.

"I've got a conundrum for you," he continued, if anything a trifle louder. "Why is Hoboken like Italy?"

"Edward!" said Grandma Epps, severely, "I must insist upon your keeping your head out of my plate."

"Hoboken like Italy? How very droll!" murmured Miss Toll, whose heart was ever with the snubbed.

"Indeed the thought has often occurred to me that there is something quite Italian in the Jersey shore," observed Miss Deusenbury, in her even, class-room voice. "And when on some misty autumn evening the sun goes down behind the dome of that great Passionist church—"

"That's not the answer," chuckled Mr. Volkert, gleefully.

"Edward, be silent!" commanded Grandma Epps.

"My son tells me that the Allan-Youngs' new house is simply gorgeous," announced Mrs. Van Gaasbeck, in a tone to compel attention. "He was there this afternoon, professionally."

"Indeed!" remarked Mrs. Van Wandeleer, fixing the speaker with suspicious eyes. "I fancied the Allan-Youngs were still abroad."

"They are," the doctor answered, hurriedly.

"It was the butler I was called to see. He ran a splinter in his thumb."

"Ah, really!" commented Mrs. Van Wandeleer, with a smile of satisfaction.

"But is not the house indeed like fairy-land?" exclaimed Miss Toll, throwing herself with tact into the breach.

"I said like Italy," corrected young Mr. Volkert, looking up hopefully from the more muscular parts of the turkey.

"Be silent!" admonished his grandmother; "no one is speaking to you."

"Anybody have a little piece more? Lovely little piece here, dainty little piece!" piped Mr. Ruggles, in seductive treble, his white shirt bosom rising moonlike behind the ruins of the bird.

"Do sit down, father," whispered Bell, "they are all helped. Eat something yourself, please do."

Then Miss Toll, remembering that Miss Van Wandeleer had been lunching in Park Avenue, asked of her some tactful question concerning the affair, and for a time the girl became the center of polite attention. She said the party had been very small, just a dozen girls, and a countess from Chicago. She thought there had been music in the hall, but did not quite remember. The favors were rather nice, and the menu about the sort of thing one expects.

Alida was never publicly critical of the rich, holding honest doubts as to whether "mere money" was such a bad thing after all, and as she finished her godmother nodded approbation.

"Is it considered the thing now-a-days to place champagne before young girls?" Mrs. Van Gaasbeck inquired. Like Rosa Dartle, she asked for information.

"Oh yes, I think so," answered Alida, sweetly, "but of course it would be horribly bad form to drink it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the doctor, breaking silence for the first time. "May I repeat that at the dispensary, Miss Van Wandeleer? The fellows would appreciate it."

"But you must not give me as an authority," continued Alida, smiling, and Bell bent forward to hear what the two were saying.

"Wine," observed Miss Deusenbury, "has always, you know, been regarded as a symbol of hospitality, especially among the Greeks, and—ahem—the Phœnicians, and to me the idea of its purely ceremonial use is charming."

"And so it is no doubt to the butler," observed Miss De Wint.

"Speaking of wine," chirped Mr. Ruggles, from behind the ham, but by that time the company were speaking of something else.

Mrs. Van Gaasbeck, it seemed, had been near

to death that day beneath the wheels of an automobile, and although the narrative of her escape was pointedly addressed to Grandma Epps alone, the others took up the discussion of perilous crossings with interest.

"I can remember a time when all the carriages belonged to one's own friends," sighed Mrs. Van Wandeleer. "The coachmen used to touch their hats and draw up to let one by!"

"Why, even the stage drivers knew us in old times!" added Miss De Wint. "They would stop at Bond Street without waiting for me to pull the strap."

"They were not always so considerate," observed Miss Deusenbury, her pale cheek flushing slightly; "I was myself nearly knocked down once by a stage on my way to school."

"Oh, tell us about it, please!" pleaded Alida.

"It was nothing, really!" protested the old teacher, crumbling a bit of bread with her long, thin fingers; "I fainted, I believe—I was a mere child—and they carried me into Ball & Black's, but it was really ridiculous, of course—it seems that Dandy Marken saw the driver's carelessness, and mounting the box, threw the ruffian to the ground."

"Oh, how delightful!" exclaimed Alida.

"No, my dear," said Miss Deusenbury, remembering, with a far-off smile, the frightened school

girl in flight through Amity Street with mud-splashed pantalettes, "it was rather absurd in the end, for Captain Marken drove the stage to the Battery himself while all the people on the sidewalk cheered."

"I remember that story," announced Miss De Wint, with reminiscent fervor. "Dandy held up his arm and shouted for passengers at every corner, and when his friends climbed on until the roof was crowded he refused to give change, and at Chambers Street threw the money to the apple-woman who always sat in front of Stewart's."

"He was a noble fellow," sighed Miss Toll. "I used to know his sisters."

"I was in his Company," proclaimed little Mr. Ruggles, for once making himself heard. "We wore the Austrian uniform and our horses were all coal black."

"Were the Markens ever really in society?" asked Mrs. Van Gaasbeck, whose memory refused to leap the Sanitary Fair.

"Perhaps not exactly in the Bond Street set," admitted Miss De Wint, "but I am afraid we were a little too strict at times."

"My father used to say that Mrs. Slingerland, the leader of that lot, was the vulgarest old woman he ever knew."

"Mrs. Slingerland was my aunt."

"Oh, was she, really? I am so sorry."

"Well, you needn't be," interrupted Miss De Wint; "Aunt Rachel was one of the few people who could afford to say exactly what she pleased."

"I'm sure that we should all like to do that at times," murmured Miss Toll.

Coffee now appearing, a diversion was made by the departure of Grandma Epps, who eschewed stimulant, and being slow of foot rose laboriously and started for the parlor, led rather than supported by Mary.

"Can't I help?" asked Edward, without warmth.

"Not till you learn the difference between a person's arm and a pump handle," said Grandma Epps.

"I think," observed Mr. Bella, pushing back his chair and looking about him with the air of one who scents Madeira, "I am convinced that Mr. Chamberlain is making a great mistake. What England needs to-day is a Palmerston."

"Indeed, I quite agree with you," assented Miss Deusenbury, folding her hands.

"Or even a Gladstone," added Miss Toll, who also relished a dash of British politics after dinner. Like the others it was the flavor she valued, not the brand, and she was never quite secure as to whether the Budget was an official or a thing.

As the company separated into gradually dissolving groups, Alida asked: "Cousin Caroline,

did you ever really have an aunt named Slingerland?"

"Certainly not, my dear," said Miss De Wint. "She was a horrid old woman we did not even know. It's broiling hot in here; come into the parlor unless you mean to smoke."

"Caroline, how can you say such things to Alida, even in jest?"

"Josephine, how do I know what tricks the girl has not picked up in the places you let her go to?"

As they moved toward the door, Alida, perceiving the battle to be on again, slipped away with a pretext of interest in Mr. Volkert's riddle, and it was while listening to its stupid answer that she stumbled upon a discovery. It happened that the Van Gaasbecks, mother and son, were leaving the room together when the doctor apparently held back to give his parent precedence. Then Bell, who was near, drew nearer, and the two exchanged some whispered words. The colloquy was brief, and in a moment they were far apart, Bell looking for something behind the clock and Van Gaasbeck in the hall debating a question of rubbers with his mother. But Alida had divined a secret. She would have been glad to embrace Bell—they had been good friends at school—and the doctor could have had her blessing for the asking, but the one thought

uppermost was an unbecoming joy at the surprise in store for Mrs. Van Gaasbeck.

"Bluebell," she said, recalling their schoolroom good-fellowship with the old school nickname, "come into my room; I've got a box of Huyler's, fresh to-day."

"Thank you, Alida, but I have a headache now, and I'm going to bed early," Bell answered, irresponsively, though her snapping eyes and heightened color suggested that it must be pleasant to have something on one's mind worth telling a story about.

In the face of Bell's large secret Alida's own seemed small, but still for purposes of exchange retained a certain market value. It was like recess again at Madame Brown's.

"Do come," she urged, persuasively; but Bell was not to be persuaded.

"I really have a letter to write," she said, forgetting her former reason, and presently Alida heard her go down to the family sitting-room in the front basement.

Miss Van Wandeleer, believing herself alone, remembered Mrs. Norris's box, regretfully. She had planned a restful evening for herself in preparation for a dance the following night, a healthful season of repose with Huyler's and a book, but now with both awaiting her in her mother's upstairs parlor neither appeared at all

desirable, and it was with unwonted satisfaction that she again became aware of Edward Volkert.

"I've got another good one for you," announced the student of law. Behind her back he had been engaged in fussily meddling with the clock, but this was not the interest that detained him.

"Oh, are you still there," she answered, turning; "I thought you were studying for some examination or something."

Alida's tone was not one to encourage riddles, and neither did the now darkened room seem suited for frivolity.

The servants had lost no time in replacing the white cloth with drapery of dingy red, and the chairs were all drawn back against the wall. The candles had given place to gas jets, and the atmosphere would have been the better for an open window.

"I guess my studies will keep," retorted Volkert, grinning, "until I have been out to get a little air."

It was a convenient belief of Grandma Epps, a sort of legal fiction, that Edward when not eating communed with Coke, while in point of fact, his presence after dinner in the house commonly endured but for the time required for her portly back to disappear behind the parlor door. Where he went, what voices called to him out of

the great, dark city, heaven only knew, and of the hour of his return only the most wakeful had an inkling.

"I should think you would be ashamed to be so deceitful," Alida said, reprovingly, interpreting the grin, and Volkert with both hands made a gesture of impatience. Jerking a chair from its place he rested one knee on the seat and leaned toward her, his elbows on the back.

"For goodness sake let up on that," he said, with the odd smile which often placated those who found his eccentricities most annoying. "How would you like never to have a person speak to you without beginning, 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself'? Wouldn't it jar you? Wouldn't it ruffle your fur?"

"You cannot expect any one to approve of your behavior," she returned, with lessened severity. Slight as her interest was in Edward Volkert, he at least was neither middle-aged nor disappointed, which merits were, though negative, to be counted in his favor.

"I can't expect much, for a fact," he readily admitted, "but it's bad enough to live in a merry morgue without having every one down on me—you especially."

"Oh, I'm not down on you," she answered, laughing. Even a tithe from Edward Volkert was welcome on a rainy night.

"I'm not worth that much trouble," he rejoined, with artful pathos, following up the slight advantage.

"I never supposed you cared much what people thought of you," she said, continuing, indulgently, "and really I don't blame you very much. Every boy should have some one to take an interest in him. You should have had a sister."

"It's a mighty good thing for her she never happened," he retorted, laughing; "she would not have been able to study law. She would have had to be respectable, and mend things, and remember the claims of a distinguished family—mostly under ground."

Alida took another chair and knelt upon it facing him. The attitude was not a serious one, but neither was the argument.

"And don't you ever think of that yourself?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, I can't forget it. I'm to have twelve hundred a year if the Guardian and Trustee don't want it when Grandma folds her napkin, and a cornelian watch fob, slightly cracked. It is a great thing to be a Knickerbocker!—

> "Oh I'm Mr. Knickerbocker,
> And my name is on the knocker,
> If you want a real old-stocker
> Call on Gerritt Knickerbocker!"

Volkert sang the comic opera patter to the

accompaniment of a dance executed as by one having gouty feet, and his wince of anguish at the end was most expressive.

"I should think," commented Alida, gravely, "that even that would teach you to have something to be proud of. If I were a man I should show people that the old stock was more than a thing to joke about. I should not allow myself to be pushed down and kept under. I should make myself and my name respected, if it were only on a knocker." She had regained her feet and stood with one hand on the chair back impressively, her eyes bright, her color heightened prettily. "Edward, your grandfather was president of Princess College," she went on, "and you—you—have you no ambition?"

"Not much, I am afraid," he answered, lightly. "I guess the breed's run down, or else the common people have grown smarter. Old Clatworthy used to be my uncle's office boy, and Barrow's father drove a hack. Ask the old lady, she has got them all down fine."

Alida tossed her head impatiently.

"What sense is there in depreciating other people?" she demanded.

"I don't," he answered, stoutly. "It's the others who depreciate me. I'm everybody's blackboy at the office, and everybody's tomfool here. My little body is a-weary of the whole

push, and I'd fly the coop to-morrow if it were not for one—one thing."

As he spoke his wandering, irresponsible eyes grew for a moment fixed and purposeful, and his voice softened.

"Alida, have you ever spoken to an actor?" he asked, and Alida, puzzled by the change of topic, answered upon reflection that she had once met Graham Foster at a tea; his wife was a De Moulde, she added.

"Which explains his being there," Volkert remarked, with irony. "Would you marry an actor?"

"It is not at all likely I shall ever have to decide about that," she answered, eying him curiously, for even silly questions often lead to something. "Now, if he were a good, kind actor, thoroughly high principled, and really great—" she debated, flippantly.

"Do you think a comic actor could ever be really great?"

"Oh, but I said high principled as well!" she reminded him, laughing, and Volkert, laughing with her, announced that he must go.

"The Body Guard comes on at nine," he said, in explanation.

"What do you mean by the Body Guard?"

"King Solomon's body guard in the 'Queen of Sheba,' of course. Know, madam, that you

have the honor of beholding a chorus gent from the Alhambra!"

"The Alhambra? You!" exclaimed Alida, with surprise, but with much less consternation than he would have liked.

"The same," said Volkert, making an Oriental salaam. "My post is on the minaret to-night, that I may warn the ladies of the household when the king draws near. There would be a lot of trouble if I should fail them, and—speaking of trouble—perhaps you won't mind waiting till yon aged dame mentions the matter before springing it on her."

"If you mean to ask me not to tell tales, that is hardly necessary," answered Alida, stiffly. "I have no wish to interfere with the chosen career for which you are so admirably adapted."

"You don't mean that exactly as a compliment," he rejoined, "but anything is better than 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself.' "

"Oh, why do you do it?" she protested, actuated by a generous impulse. "If you must go on the stage, why not try to be another sort of actor?"

"Would it make any difference to you?" he asked, with sudden seriousness. "Would it make one particle of difference, now or ever?"

"Of course, as an old friend—" began Alida, feebly, but he interrupted her.

"Let us omit the doxology," he said. "Good night."

"You cannot say good night until I am ready," said Alida, "and I am not ready yet."

"I'll stay here all the evening, if you'll let me."

"No, you are better off on your minaret. I only want you to understand that I am not shocked, and that I don't consider you a desperate character. You will probably get very tired of all this before long, but meanwhile you must make me a promise."

"That's dead easy! Anything you like."

"Then promise," she commanded, solemnly, "that you won't drink cocktails with those horrid people behind the scenes."

"Cocktails!" he exclaimed, derisively, "never fear, I haven't got a nickel for the growler."

"So much the better," she retorted, holding out her hand, which he took in both of his.

"Whatever you may think of me," he said, "I'll back you for a thoroughbred."

CHAPTER IV

AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS

If Miss Van Wandeleer did not at once deliver the message left by the unnamed stranger from Oro City to her godmother, she should not be too severely criticised. No fitting opportunity occurred in which to present the entire incident of the visit in its true proportions. And this was, in a way, unfortunate, as in the interval of waiting the days of grace allowed to minor incidents expired. She could readily explain the circumstances, she reflected, were she ever to meet the visitor again. And of this there seemed a reasonable probability. One generally meets people again.

"Alida, if you are not going to a chicken-show or to play parlor foot-ball, or to church," remarked Miss De Wint, one afternoon within the octave of the sleet storm, "I should like to have you come with me."

"Have you anything to carry, Cousin Caroline?" inquired Alida with caution, but at the same time she laid her book aside.

"Nothing at all," replied her godmother, reassuringly; "I am only going out to make a call."

"What shall I wear?"

"Oh, anything that is not too good. I want to see if Mrs. Van der Werff is still alive. I haven't been there for a year."

They were in the upstairs sitting-room, and Alida's hat, conveniently pinned to the back of a sofa, was not far to seek.

"She is the old lady who lives so excessively upstairs, and opens the front door by machinery," remarked Alida, as standing before the glass she recalled a former visit to Mrs. Van der Werff.

"She don't go flying up and down in elevators, and she don't employ an inhibited curate to stare you out of countenance, but she is a lady for all that," her sponsor said, reprovingly.

"Indeed she is," rejoined Alida, warmly, pushing in the final pin. "I would give anything to say 'devil' with such real refinement."

"Mrs. Van der Werff has had more than her share of trouble."

"Oh, yes; I know it takes a lot of practice."

In the street they turned eastward as far as University Place; then north past the French hotel, the old furniture shop that has seen so much better days, and the library whose subscription list is history itself. At Fourteenth Street they avoided Dead Man's Curve by a diagonal course across Union Square.

"I remember being at a party once in that third house from the corner," began Miss De Wint. But the fascinating memories of Miss De Wint were legion. At Irving Place she had an anecdote for every corner; at St. George's a romance for every house. Ah, the good old people and the good old days, when the Eden gates stood wide open as those of Stuyvesant Park! Just before you were born, my dear. And once upon a time the pigs drank wine—just before you were born.

"Cassidy. Bodkin. Assenheimer. Strapp." Alida read aloud from the row of bells as she and Miss De Wint stood waiting in a neat but narrow vestibule. "I wonder if Mrs. Van der Werff knows the Strapps, or if the Assenheimers will drop in to tea?"

"Alida," returned Miss De Wint, severely, "how can you be so heartless!"

"I'm not," protested Alida, stoutly; "if I lived here I'd know them all. There is no advantage in being poor if you can't be common. It would be like being well off without a taste for music or artichokes."

When presently the door, with a mechanical click of welcome, swung open on a cautious crack, the visitors found themselves in a tiled hallway, scrupulously clean, and smelling of varnish. Somewhere in the center of the building

arose the means of access to the heights above. This stairway, being rectangular, was broken into innumerable short flights, with intermediate platforms and landings which greatly magnified the vertical perspective. After a turn or so one ceased to count, and experienced the elation of doing something worthy. Then unexpected doors bearing inscriptions—Cassidy—Bodkin—contributed the sustenance of human presence as might the sight of casual Alpine farms. Upon the more important stations—every hundred metres in altitude perhaps—there were chairs; that is, one chair to every station. Cousin Caroline walked past the first of these disdainfully; at the second she stood still to look down and up—which is always a mistake—and at the third she seated herself, frankly.

"Alida," she began, "if ever you should marry—" and here Miss Caroline paused for breath.

"If ever I do marry," returned Alida, sitting down, regardless of her skirt, upon the lower step of the next ascent, "I shall marry a Cassidy and live on the first flight up."

"I was about to say," went on Miss De Wint—and her words were still a trifle over-punctuated—"that the country has a great many advantages after all. But then, when one has to choose between vulgarity and malaria, and there don't

seem to be any one left to marry, one does not know exactly how to advise."

"And if there should happen to be any one left I might not like him or he might not like me," Alida added, making the case more hopeless than before.

"I trust you will never throw yourself away," continued Miss De Wint, reflectively. "Young girls in our day have so little sense; they think when a man has fallen desperately in love with them there is nothing more to ask."

"Oh, I should require lots of things," protested the neophyte, in her own defense. "Family, for one thing; that is the first essential."

As she did not know why she laughed her godmother could scarcely be expected to.

"It is a serious matter," rejoined the elder lady, seriously. "One cannot even trust good names any longer, there has been such a lot of indiscriminate marrying. Just as you, my dear, are only half De Wint, though thank goodness the other half's Van Wandeleer. No, names don't count for anything."

"No," assented Alida, with a little sigh; "think how the Adamses must have got diluted."

"Now there is that young Osterhout who sends you orchids," persisted Miss De Wint—she rarely had her godchild in so close a corner—"there is not a better name to be found, outside of a very

few, but his mother's father was a frightful person who manufactured stockings."

"No, Cousin Caroline, seamless underwear," corrected Alida. "'See that K. O. K. is woven on every piece!'"

"You must be careful not to let that young man become too attentive."

"I shall try," replied Alida, dutifully. "When he confided to me that K. O. K. meant Keep Out Kold, I only said I would ask my dealer for them. Was not that reserved and ladylike?"

They did not stop again till Strapp, and then but for a brief recuperation for the final effort.

"What sort of people do those Brisbanes know?" demanded Miss De Wint, tenacious of a train of thought of which the burden might be guessed.

"Oh, nobody very much as yet. Just millionaires and wandering dukes, and people they cross the ocean with. I don't believe they could give anything very big without the Waldorf register. Mrs. Brisbane is not ambitious, and Mr. Brisbane only likes the fun of making money; but Bessie, I am sure, will get there with both feet."

"Alida," cried Miss De Wint, stopping short, one foot upon the penultimate flight, "where under heaven did you learn such an expression?"

"Why, Cousin Caroline, that is a classic in the

language. It means that she will win unqualified success."

"Then you had much better say so."

Discussion was here interrupted by the appearance of a head outlined against the skylight just above, which head, being that of Mrs. Van der Werff's general utility, signified both that the bell was broken and a disposition on the part of the utility to anticipate events.

"Is Mrs. Van der Werff at home?"

"In there," replied the servant, tersely, with a movement of the thumb toward the open door; and by way of apology she added, "There's somebody else a'comin' up, I guess."

"Good gracious, if that isn't Caroline De Wint! Well, Caroline, how are you? Time does not stand still for either of us."

The speaker was seated in a rocking-chair beside a window overlooking miles of brown tin roofs from which near at hand rose many chimneys, and further off steeples and towers and stacks and sky-scrapers under white columns of flying steam. She was a stout old lady who either parted her hair on one side or had been careless in adjusting its convenient counterfeit, and her dress, though otherwise unexceptionable, gave the impression of being so loosely held together that it was just as well she did not attempt to rise.

"Excuse my not getting up," she said; "I never get up for any one. Who's that?"

By "that" she clearly meant Alida.

"This," said Miss De Wint, sinking into a chair unasked, "is Miss Van Wandeleer."

"Miss Fiddle!" exclaimed Mrs. Van der Werff, derisively. "Who was her father?"

"Why, Valentine Van Wandeleer, of course."

"What, Josephine's child? My goodness! how the devil came Josephine De Wint to have a pretty daughter? Stand out, my dear, and show yourself."

Whereupon Alida reluctantly stood out.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty," still more reluctantly.

"Engaged to be married?"

"No," almost defiantly.

"Why not?"

Alida did not answer.

"Fiddle!" remarked Mrs. Van der Werff.

"Sit down, Alida," put in Cousin Caroline; "you must be tired."

"Why should she be?" demanded Mrs. Van der Werff, suspecting a reference to the stairs; and in a more genial tone she said, "I'm glad to see you both."

The room, which was small, was papered in stripes so positive as to give one the sensation of being hung up in a bird cage. The furniture,

for the most part unsubstantial, modern, and inexpensive, lost nothing of those qualities by contrast with a cumberous carved oak cabinet and a standing clock—the Van der Werff equivalents for The Tankard and The Spoon. By way of decoration there were several bits of Eastern printed cotton draped meaninglessly here and there, and on a very small piano stood a spiky growing plant. Apart from a gray goat-skin rug which became at times aggressive, Mrs. Van der Werff's apartment was as cheerful as that lady herself.

"I'll give you some tea in a minute when that devilish girl gets through hanging over the banisters," she said, hospitably. "Do you like tea, my dear?"

Alida answered with slight regard to truth that she liked tea very much.

"I'm sorry to hear it," said her hostess; "it's very bad for you. Caroline De Wint, tell me who is dead."

"Oh, I have not heard of any one lately. Of course you heard about—" and Cousin Caroline enumerated several recent takings off.

"Fiddle!" remarked the other most ungratefully. Then prompted by a shuffle in the anteroom, she raised her voice and cried, "Why the devil don't you come in, you blundering young giraffe? Don't stand there scratching like a cat."

"I'm taking off my overshoes," replied a mild and masculine voice, and the visitors, turning toward the door, saw enter a gray-haired gentleman, tall, but slightly stooping, eminently sedate, and wearing the high cut waistcoat of divinity.

"Oh, Doctor Groesbeck," said Mrs. Van der Werff, unabashed, "I thought you were the orphan."

"I am an orphan," replied the doctor, smiling quietly, "and also I fear at times a blundering giraffe. Why, Miss Caroline, this is indeed a pleasure."

"Here is my godchild," said Cousin Caroline, when she and the newcomer had shaken hands most cordially. "Alida, Doctor Groesbeck was an old friend of your father's."

Alida, becoming properly ancillary, allowed her hand to remain in the custody of the clergyman as he said, "An old friend, very truly. I was no longer a young man when your father went to Harvard. I used to say his course there was my own, and I was proud to graduate so well. I never went to college."

There was a gentle, old-time graciousness about this clergyman of whom she had never heard before, but who had known her father, and Alida listened gladly as he talked, recalling musty, commonplace memories with the elder women. Sometimes they differed concerning unimportant dates,

or the trivial deeds of long dead people; but at such times, Mrs. Van der Werff's ever-ready "devil" appeared to restore harmony.

Once, when the conversation touched upon theology, Mrs. Van der Werff exclaimed, "Fiddle! the churches fight like cats and dogs, and how are you going to stop it?"

"I should say, take care of the catechisms and the dogmas will take care of themselves," replied the old gentleman, neatly.

Afterward Alida learned that Doctor Groesbeck was the vicar of a small mission chapel which was ever on the eve of being closed for want of funds, and she made a mental addition to the list of things she meant to do when she was rich.

By and by came tea, much too strong, without the possibility of being weakened by reason of there being no hot water, and Doctor Groesbeck produced a card-board box of little cakes, which seemed to be a customary tribute on his part to Mrs. Van der Werff.

"He thinks they put me in a good humor to listen to his sermons when he brings them around to read to me," she explained.

"I suppose you do not often get to church," ventured Alida, with sympathy.

"No, my dear, I haven't been to church since they changed the prayer book, and I don't see

why the devil they could not let it alone. I don't pretend to be a Christian, but thank God I'm a good Protestant."

In a momentary pause which followed this profession of faith, the voice of the orphan became audible without. .

"Just sail right in, Miss Sheepmouse, there's nothing doin' only the old bloke and a couple of dames."

Into the eyes of Mrs. Van der Werff there came an evil gleam, but she merely said, in a hoarse and hurried whisper, "Caroline, do you remember Serena Laurens?"

"Yes, poor Serena; I hear she has had to go into a Home."

"Hush, don't shout so, here comes her daughter. I've got her here with me; there was not another place on earth for her to go. Remember that, Van Wandeleer, and don't you dare to patronize!"

"Alida never patronizes."

"Well, don't let her begin."

"I think Miss Schepmoes called on us the other day," Alida said.

Miss Serena Schepmoes was not a young lady to defend from patronage. As she came in panting from the long ascent, she stood a moment on the threshold, just long enough, it seemed, to grasp the situation, then going to each guest in

turn, she displayed a most discriminating sense of values, deference, reverence, respect, and open gratification; the last toward Alida, beside whom she immediately took her place.

"I've been out looking for a situation," she announced with charming candor, while it occurred to Alida that her eyes were not so very near together after all. Her hair was brown and soft and wavy, and she had a very nice complexion. In spite of her mother's unkind remark, Alida was disposed to like Miss Schepmoes.

"Oh, have you, really!" said Alida. "What fun it must have been."

"But it wasn't," said Serena; "not just one little bit."

The account that followed was brief and sketchy and picturesque. It appeared that in a single day Miss Schepmoes had offered to become, for hire, a private secretary, a figure in a cloak department, a trained nurse, and a member of the chorus.

"You see, it is always better when they know something about you," she explained. "So I went to Mr. Assenheimer who works in a hospital, and to Bodkin, who manufactures cloaks, and to Cassidy, who has a theatrical agency; they all live in this house, which gives me some sort of claim for civility at least."

"Why did not you try Strapp, too?" Alida asked. But Strapp, unfortunately, was a widow.

"The only one who was any good at all was Cassidy," went on Serena, "and he had nothing just at present but the Alhambra, and that I should not like at all, would you?"

Alida was quite certain that either would find the Alhambra distasteful, and asked about the secretaryship.

"Oh, that was just a flyer; I walked into the biggest office I could find and asked the most conceited looking man if they needed a private secretary. Would you believe it, he asked me to come in and gave me a chair and began at once to talk about my qualifications. I really thought I had struck something, because I can write shorthand, and I am a pretty good typewriter, till suddenly he began to laugh, and said, 'Suppose we go out to lunch and talk it over.'"

As Miss Schepmoes paused to allow the significance of this announcement to take effect, Alida flushed to the roots of her hair. "Of course you came away at once," she said, indignantly.

"Oh, no; I only said, 'You have not asked me for my references.' 'Yes, by the way, who are your references?' said he, still laughing; and I answered just as calmly as I could, Mrs. Tunis Van der Werff, and Mrs. Valentine Van Wande-

leer, and half a dozen others, ending up with the Bishop of New York. You should have seen him stare. 'I'm afraid there has been some mistake,' he said, insolently; 'this is not the Guardian and Trustee Company'—and I couldn't think of anything worse than leaving the door open."

"What are you two talking about?" cried Mrs Van der Werff, shrilly, and at the same time tossing a sofa pillow at the girls to attract attention. "Van Wandeleer, why can't you find Serena a place; you know all these shoddy millionaires."

"I can," announced Alida, "and I will."

"You mean that you will do your best," said Cousin Caroline, correctingly.

"No," said Alida, "I mean that I will ask Mr. Brisbane to give Miss Schepmoes a nice, easy place with a good salary, and I am sure he will do it."

"And who the devil is Mr. Brisbane?" demanded Mrs. Van der Werff.

"I think he is interested in railways and such things," explained Alida, modestly, "and he has to have a great many clerks, so I am sure he will be glad to know of some one he can trust implicitly."

"Where did he come from?"

"Peoria, I think."

"Lord!" muttered Mrs. Van der Werff, "how the mud is getting stirred up!"

Serena kissed Alida at the door, at which effusive sign of progress toward a close intimacy Cousin Caroline seemed far from gratified, but Doctor Groesbeck said, in shaking hands: "If more of us poor Dutchmen knew how to say, 'I will,' we should not be crowded out so completely."

"Don't tell her that," snapped Cousin Caroline; "what she needs to learn is how to say, 'I won't!' " But in a milder tone, she asked him to extend his parochial calls to Kenilworth Place, and this he promised to do in the spring, when he returned from Delaware.

"I shall exchange climates for the winter," he explained, "with a younger man who wants to see visions while I am quite contented to dream dreams."

"But won't your people miss you?" asked Alida.

"Not very much, I fear," he answered; "but I shall miss the squirrels in the Park."

"He seems a very kind old gentleman," said Alida, when she and Cousin Caroline were again in Stuyvesant Square; "he took being called a giraffe so well."

"Humph!" returned her godmother, "I called him something once much worse than that."

And as her lips took on an expression forbidding further question, Alida reflected that to be close-mouthed was not the most engaging gift of the De Wints.

CHAPTER V

THE END *OF A* CENTURY

One generally sees people a second time; even casual strangers, if they have anything noticeable about them, are sure to reappear sooner or later, just as one meets the Whistling Coon, the Fifth Avenue Stork, the Little Old Lady who still wears flounces, or the man with scriptural texts upon his hat, with a regularity that would be curious if it happened to be of the slightest consequence. Thus Miss Van Wandeleer, when she recalled her visitor from the sleet storm, reflected also that to be lost in the largest haystack argues little wit on the part of a needle.

Meanwhile the holidays came, lingered, and went on their way, which meant for Alida small, stupid parties and the callow experimental love-making of boys from college. Once, catching sight of the Brisbane ladies in the vicinity of Tiffany's she had dropped a dollar in the Salvation Army pot to restore her peace of mind. Again, her zeal for tying packages had given great encouragement to the rector. But to really enjoy the holidays one should have money, uncounted money, in a coal-scuttle, let us say, with

a convenient little fire-shovel close at hand; and in default of this, even K. O. K. expressed in orchids may meet with failure in its simple mission.

Christmas in Kenilworth Place was less a feast than an ordeal to be gone through with gracefully. All the ladies, young and old, went to church as often as the church's doors were open, and their talk between whiles was of sacred music. Mr. Ruggles explained the causes of the current war to an attentive audience; and Edward Volkert's account of the Feeding of the Multitude at the Garden was listened to with interest. For it was the one day when reminiscence was allowed to sleep.

But New Year's Day is different. He is a hard old heathen, and strikes the table with his fist and bellows for the glasses to be filled. He is like cold-eyed Winter, who stalks unbidden to the fire and remembers the cave bear; like painted Spring, who used to flirt with Pan.

They had been talking of olekooks over the coffee-cups, and of their doubtful offspring, the degenerate modern doughnut; of pickled oysters, and of New Year's calls.

"When young men began to wear evening dress at noon," contributed Mrs. Bruyn Van Gaasbeck, "we simply hung baskets on the bells to keep them out."

"For my part," put in Mrs. Van Wandeleer, "I should feel very much neglected if a few old friends did not call to wish us a Happy New Year. Whatever the fashion may be, I shall always be ready to receive whoever comes, and so, I hope, will my daughter as long as she lives."

"Yes, indeed, mother," assented Alida, loyally. "We shall have a crumby cake while there are caraway seeds in the market; and when I am ninety I shall brew the last New Year's punch in a coffee-cup and drink it all alone by myself."

"Oh, make it a teacup and give an old man a show!" pleaded Mr. Volkert, elevating his voice and his goblet of water at the same time. Then with fingers tremulous with simulated age he croaked from a mouth apparently toothless: "Mistress Van Wandeleer, your punch is excellent; let us drink to The Last of the Knickerbockers."

"Edward, be silent!" admonished Grandma Epps, regarding him with pained surprise. But from his end of the table little Mr. Ruggles caught the toast, and springing to his feet exclaimed, approvingly: "A fine sentiment, my boy! A noble sentiment! Though it is only water we have, it is Croton Water, the *vin du pays* from the old Westchester hills! Ladies and gentlemen,

the toast is the Last of the Knickerbockers, whoever he may be!"

For a moment a smoldering spark of fun leaped up in Mr. Bella's ashen eyes, and as one pink lid was lowered in a wink toward the doctor, who applauded and cried "Hear, hear!" it was as if he stood again in some forgotten revel of the Troop, and drank Green Seal to Laura Kean.

"Whoever he may be," repeated Miss Toll, and she and Miss Deusenbury sipped their glasses reverently. Cousin Caroline drank with affected gusto, Alida and her mother laughing, and Mrs. Van Gaasbeck not at all, while Bella Junior forgot everything in the fear that her father was being silly, and Bella Senior had no idea of what was going on.

It was the last night of the year, a shabby, sordid year to those who sat at Bella Ruggles's table; but a thrifty one withal, that had left gowns to turn again and gloves that would bear several cleanings still.

There were feasts innumerable that night throughout New Amsterdam, from the janitor's kitchen, far up among the winter stars, to where the hansom cabs stood black against a million throbbing lights. Somewhere the ice fell rattling in a silver bucket when the fat, green bottle was withdrawn, and somewhere else a tin can went from lip to lip, and everywhere old friends, old

times, were toasted. But if the ghosts come back, the good old ghosts, to wish good luck to all who can remember, then William of the testy temper and Peter of the wooden leg touched glasses in the down-town boarding-house where they were not forgotten.

"Bell," said Alida later, when the four young people found themselves alone, "don't you wish that everything amusing had not been over and done with long before we were born?"

They sat in their respective seats with the breadth of the disordered table before them, Bell and Van Gaasbeck on one side, separated by three empty chairs, and Alida and Volkert on the other, separated by one.

"And what do you call amusing?" inquired the doctor, speaking out of turn as he polished his heavy glasses with a napkin.

"If you mean New Year's calls," said Bell, "I can't imagine anything more stupid."

"Oh, I don't mean anything in particular," rejoined Alida, "only I should like to be gathering reminiscences to entertain the young when I am old."

"Perhaps by that time we shall all have developed imagination," said the doctor, quietly.

"What's the use of imagination when it's too late to have any fun?" demanded Volkert, adding boldly: "The trouble with you people

is too much family Bible. I would not stand it."

"But we have not all got your resources," said Alida, and Bella Junior, with unwonted spirit, asked, "What would you do?"

"I'd do the first thing that came into my head, and trust to luck."

"And what would that be this very minute?" asked the doctor, putting on his glasses as though for an examination. "Come, don't hesitate!"

"I'd celebrate to-night."

"Good!" said the doctor; "how?" and both girls felt a thrill of unconfessed anticipation.

"Am I to be in it?" asked Mr. Volkert, cautiously.

"The question is, are we to be in it?" said the doctor, laughing, and the listeners laughed in sympathy, for the doctor was a serious man and would not have gone so far without a purpose.

"All right," agreed the younger man; "I've got one dollar and seven cents, and I want to begin the New Year broke."

"That's just what I have," said the doctor "one dollar and seven cents."

"So have I," said Bell.

"And so have I," Alida echoed.

"I say," protested Volkert, gallantly; "we can't let the girls chip in."

"Why not?" inquired Van Gaasbeck, seriously; "I don't know what you have in mind, but I don't think four twenty-eight a bit too much."

"We might go to the theater and get four dollar seats."

"No, no!" cried Bella, in alarm, "we must not think of doing anything that requires asking permission." While Alida, though she felt the force of the objection, ventured a hope in masculine invention.

"Then," said Volkert, "there is nothing left for us but Trinity Bells."

"Trinity Bells!"

"Trinity Bells!"

There was something rhythmic in the very words to set the pulses chiming, and neither had hoped for an adventure half so daring.

"That's my scheme," and Volkert became father to the plan so well received. "We will all lie low till bed-time"—here he winked and indicated with his thumb the parlor door—"then we will do a sneak."

"A what?" asked somebody.

"A vanishing act. We have here, ladies and gentlemen, four young persons—if you don't believe it you can stick pins in them—we close the cabinet but an instant, and presto! they are gone."

"Oh, Dick, what do you think of it?" cried

Bella Junior, turning to Van Gaasbeck, anxiously. On the instant she checked herself, but all too late, for had the syllable left anything in doubt her cheeks proclaimed a secret free.

"Thank heaven, that cat's out at last!" cried Volkert, with unfeeling mirth. "Here, puss, puss, puss, come here, nice puss!"

"If it's not too soon I wish you both a very Happy New Year," said Alida, from her heart, and running round to Bell she kissed her affectionately. To the doctor she held out both hands, while Mr. Volkert, draped in napkins, assumed an attitude of benediction.

"It must be a comfort to find that we are not in the least surprised," went on Alida, and Bell became composed enough to ask: "Oh, do you think that every one—"

"Oh, no, indeed, I am sure not," answered Alida, with conviction, and Volkert added, "They think that things gave up happening fifty years ago."

"Of course you understand—" began the doctor.

"Nothing could make me breathe a word," Alida interposed.

"And nobody ever listens to what I say," said Volkert, reassuringly.

"Of course you understand," resumed the doctor, "that the evening's entertainment is on me."

"But are not we going to hear the bells?" cried Alida.

"There is nothing better for the appetite than open air," he rejoined, professionally.

There had been a general relaxation of rules in honor of the night, and an upsetting of established usage. Mrs. Van Gaasbeck had challenged Grandma Epps at cribbage, Bella Senior, Mrs. Van Wandeleer, Miss Caroline, and Mr. Ruggles were to make four at whist, and the Misses Toll and Deusenbury were to decide mooted points at either table. It was further understood that should any one elect to sit up till midnight, a jelly cake might be found in the pantry, together with materials for lemonade. Judging from certain notes of mild hilarity the spirit of carnival already stirred behind the red mahogany doors, while in the dining-room the fruity ceiling sent back more merriment than it had done for many a day.

Volkert engaged in an inane attempt to make a chime of finger bowls. Bell, still pleasantly embarrassed, idly floated almond shells with eyes intent upon her portent. Alida still stood so near to Van Gaasbeck as to be sensible of iodoform; and the doctor, who had risen, had not regained his normal color. The scene was pastoral in its simplicity, and it was upon it that the tempest broke.

"Of course there are one or two reasons just at present—" he was saying to the new-found ally, with a world of confidence in his lowered tones and highly magnified eyes, when suddenly a voice of ominous calm spoke from the door the one word:

"Richard!"

It was a time for instant action. To hesitate, to start, to turn were madness, to continue looking into each other's eyes utter imbecility.

Alida, opening her mouth, thrust out a small pink tongue.

"Don't move, please," said the doctor, professional instinct coming to his aid, and taking a coffee spoon from the table he pressed the handle gently upon the unruly member. "Say R—r!" he commanded.

"R-r-r-r," gurgled Alida. "R-r-r-r."

"Richard!" the voice in the doorway spoke again, more sternly.

"Presently, mother," replied the physician, stooping to get a better view, and in a cheering, bedside manner he went on: "I perceive a certain irritation, but nothing that we cannot overcome with a little caution. Keep in the open air as much as possible, and I will give you a prescription later."

The doctor smiled with satisfaction in his

diagnosis, while the patient credited him with unsuspected talents. As he dipped the spoon in a finger-bowl and wiped it on a napkin before laying it aside, he said, as one recalled from thought: "Ah, mother, is the game over?"

"No, Richard, the game has apparently just begun," replied his parent, meaningly.

"Has it, indeed?" with interest. "You see I have a new case. Miss Van Wandeleer was afraid she had overtaxed her voice, but I see no occasion for anxiety."

"Thank you so much," Alida murmured, and Mrs. Van Gaasbeck remarked: "I would suggest that in future Miss Van Wandeleer sing her negro melodies in a lower key."

"Oh, it is too kind in you to think of me at all," replied the sufferer.

"I shall watch your symptoms with the greatest interest," the mother answered.

"And I," rejoined Alida, warmly, "shall put my whole trust in your son."

Meanwhile Bell and Volkert had held a whispered consultation, which resulted in that young gentleman's circuitous exit through the pantry, which had a service stairway.

"It's time for me to hit the pike," he said, departing.

"Call back that boy!" commanded Mrs. Van Gaasbeck; "his grandmother wants a handker-

chief," but no one seemed disposed to do her bidding.

"I'll take her mine," announced Alida, sweetly; "see, it's not even unfolded," and acting on the impulse she darted past the elder lady out into the hall. But at the parlor door she paused to call, "Oh, Doctor Van Gaasbeck, I have forgotten the name of that medicine; won't you come here and write it down for me?"

"Of course; how thoughtless in me," he replied, and hurried after her, his mother following keen upon the scent.

"It is already past your office time," she said.

"I rather thought I'd let the office go to-night," he answered, boldly.

"Not go to your office! What will your patients think?"

"I hope they will think I have a consultation; that is, if there are any there, which is doubtful. Besides, I don't want to be detained to-night, I have an engagement with some friends to hear the chimes."

"What friends?"

"Oh, quite a little party, I believe."

Mrs. Van Gaasbeck did not press her question, but cast toward Alida a look of triumph.

"The party will not be entirely masculine, I suppose," she suggested, with unwonted leniency.

"I hope not," said the doctor, and upon catching sight of Bell, who from the rear made signals of instruction, he took his overcoat from its peg. "Good night, mother," he said, shortly; "and good night Miss Van Wandeleer, I am sure you will do nothing rash." To which the young lady answered with a smile of sweet assurance.

Mrs. Van Gaasbeck had not missed the smile, and when the two were alone, she turned upon her foe with righteous wrath. "Alida Van Wandeleer," she ejaculated, biting off her words, "I can read you through and through."

"Can you, Mrs. Van Gaasbeck?" returned the transparent one, defiantly. "Then it is from you the doctor gets his cleverness."

"I shall tell you exactly what I think of your conduct," announced the mother, her cub-protecting instinct thoroughly aroused.

"Please don't tell it here," Alida pleaded. "Your son insists that I should keep away from draughts."

"There is nothing the matter with you, you have been deceiving my son, there is nothing in the world the matter with you."

"Then he has been deceiving me, in giving me some horrible prescription."

"Alida Van Wandeleer—" began Mrs. Van Gaasbeck again, as though the name was in itself an accusation, but the other interrupted.

"Please come into the parlor; it is really chilly here, and I should like to ask Cousin Caroline what she thinks of a doctor who could play such tricks upon a patient."

"My son never plays tricks."

"But if he told you there was nothing the matter with me—"

"I did not say he told me."

"Then how could you possibly know?"

"You are a wicked and deceitful girl!"

"Mrs. Van Gaasbeck," replied Alida, composedly, "I should not say such things if I were you; you may be wrong, you know, and then you would feel obliged to beg my pardon."

"Beg your pardon!"

"Yes; wouldn't you be sorry if I were really very ill?"

"Girl!" said the other, scornfully.

"I don't mind being called a girl," rejoined Alida, "but I am neither wicked nor designing."

"Don't you consider it wicked to flirt?"

"No, Mrs. Van Gaasbeck, do you?"

"I call it both sly and deceitful."

"But not wicked."

"I never said wicked."

"You mean you did not intend to say wicked."

"Not in the sense in which you seem to have taken it."

"Then," said Alida, graciously, "let us say

no more about it. Of course now that you are sorry, I shall never mention the subject again."

"Come down here, Alida," whispered Bell from the shadow of the basement stairs, when the battle had been tacitly declared a draw. "The servants are in the dining-room."

The girls descended to the lower floor, crossed the narrow entry, and found themselves in a large, low ceilinged room, whose windows were upon a level with the street. The room was furnished with odds and ends of furniture, once impressive, the arm-chairs were large and comfortable, and the shaded lamp gave to the place an air of homely habitableness.

"Alida," began Bell, closing the door behind them, "we have got you into trouble, but if you will only wait until I can see Richard I promise that everything shall be explained and set right."

"I think that the situation is perfect as it is," replied Alida, leaning against the table and a little flurried by her late encounter. "If we had planned it ourselves it could not possibly have been better."

"But, Alida, Mrs. Van Gaasbeck evidently thinks—"

"Yes, she thinks me wicked and designing, but then she has thought that for months, so why complicate matters? Why confuse the poor woman with too many ideas at the same time?"

"But the things she said to you!"

"Yes, and the things I said to her! Wasn't it all funny?"

Bell sighed. "I tried hard to have courage to come out and tell the truth. Oh, I wish I could have done that," she cried, remorsefully.

"But that would have been a thousand times worse," Alida answered. "Fancy our having a regular row in the hall, and all the others running out to see what was the matter, just like —"

Alida intended to say "like a farce," but Bell interrupted.

"Like a horrid, common, vulgar boarding-house!" she cried, passionately, throwing herself into a chair and pressing her handkerchief to her eyes. "Oh, Alida, how can you speak to me? How can you have anything to do with me? Oh, why does not Richard go away and forget me? They will say that he married his boarding-house keeper's daughter; they will laugh at him behind his back and snub him to his face, and only call him in to treat their butlers and housemaids, and his mother will hate me all the days of her life."

"But she does not hate you yet, she only hates me."

"When Richard hears of it—"

"If you ever let him hear of it you will deserve to have him go away and forget you."

"Oh, Alida!"

But Miss Van Wandeleer, who had taken a book from the table, appeared oblivious of Bell's affairs, and so she remained till, after many minutes, the latter said: "Perhaps you are right."

"Bell," said Alida, regarding her companion critically, "why don't you do your hair that way oftener? It's so becoming."

"I never used to think so myself," Bell answered, with a blush, "but Dick says—" and after this admission the narrative of how she came to change her views followed logically.

It was a long story because there was ample time for its telling, and it was a good story because it was the sort of story that is always good. It had a witch in it and a wolf—a large and meager wolf—and a maid in a tower, and a lover who had apparently no means of getting her out, and although it broke off suddenly before the fortunate circumstances appeared, it was bound to turn out happily in the end.

"Then there is nothing in the way but money?" commented Alida, incorrectly.

"That's all," said Bella Junior; "just a little bit of money."

"Ah," piped Mr. Bella, bustling in upon them two hours later, "having a little chat, cosy little chat, I see. That's right, children. I'm going

to bed, Bell, dear, your mother has gone to bed, everybody has gone to bed. Alida, your cousin plays a strong game—rattling strong game I call it—no scientific nonsense, no holding back good cards for the other side to trump."

"Did you and Miss De Wint win, father?" inquired Bell, with interest, though the question was hardly necessary.

"Sha'n't say anything about who won," replied the little gentleman, slyly. "Alida, your mother plays a strong game, and so does Mrs. Ruggles. I tell you it was a battle for the odd at every hand."

"Oh, father, who did win?" demanded Bell so earnestly that the good man chuckled with delight.

"Table secrets," he replied; "can't tell table secrets outside the club. That used to be the rule when I was in the Union, and I don't believe they've changed it yet."

"Did you play whist often at the club, Mr. Ruggles?" asked Alida.

"Play, my dear! why I was a regular gambler. Twenty-five cents a corner, two shillings, never any higher. Lord bless my soul, what games we used to have! Larry Van Sicklen and your father—God's gentleman your father was, always the same whether he won or lost, and a better man to finesse a bad hand never sat at a table.

If he had lived, my dear, he would have been Secretary of State, my word for it he would."

"Is not Alida very like her father?" Bell inquired.

"Yes; she has his forehead, but her mother's eyes. Ever see those lines 'To Josephine's Eyes' that were printed in the *Mirror?* Every one said Willis wrote them. Wonderfully clever poet, Willis; best man we ever had."

"Was my father usually your partner at whist?"

"No, no; the two Vans always played together. My partner was poor Anthony De Wint, your godmother's brother."

"Why, I never knew she had a brother!" exclaimed Alida, in surprise.

"No, I suppose not. She would not be likely to speak of him. He died out West before you were born. I don't know how or where, though my word for it, there was nothing that could not be known to all the world. But they are a close-mouthed lot, the De Wints, and Dutch as Edam cheese."

"Did Anthony De Wint ever marry?"

"No, indeed, my word for it. There were a lot of tales afloat once about his marrying a squaw or a Mexican heiress or something of the sort, but bless my soul, Anthony would never have thought of being married without telling me."

"Did he look anything like Cousin Caroline?" persisted Alida, her chin upon her hand, and her eyes regarding the fringe of the table-cloth.

"Not a bit; not a bit; though of course there never was a De Wint whose hair did not have a little twist in the middle of the forehead—a most becoming little twist, Alida, I do assure you."

"A cowlick, they call it," said Alida, laughing.

"Perhaps so, my dear, perhaps so," assented Mr. Ruggles; "but for my part I never saw a cow whose hair was long enough to curl. Good night, children; don't sit up too late."

"But we are going to see the New Year in."

"Waiting to see the New Year in," repeated the little man, pausing at the door. "No, children, waiting, I'm afraid, to throw the old aside because it is threadbare and out of fashion. Some day you will lay the years away in lavender. But that's the old man speaking; when I was a boy I thought the Trinity Bells the finest sound in all the world; they used to ring 'A Good Time Coming.'"

"But, father, it is coming still," cried Bella Junior, springing up and throwing her arms about his neck. "Say that you believe it is coming still."

"Not coming, daughter, but here. That I have learned, the good time is always here,"

and turning he kissed her gently on the forehead—he did not have to stoop.

"And won't you kiss me, too?" said Alida, stepping forward.

"So your father would have kissed my Bell. He was God's gentleman," said little Mr. Ruggles.

CHAPTER VI

REDDENS LAUDES DOMINO

Somewhere about eleven o'clock there was a tapping on the window-pane, a premeditated telegraphic tapping, and Bell sprang up.

"You know the worst of us now, Alida," she said, with characteristic eagerness to forestall compassion, "even to the area signals!"

A moment later Van Gaasbeck entered with snow upon his shoulders and beads of melted flakes upon his cheeks and nose.

"I say, it's snowing hard!" he cried at once, as though a snowstorm were the one thing needed to make their enterprise a complete success.

"What fun!" exclaimed Alida, and Bell immediately agreed with both.

The doctor wore an odd little forage cap, which being brimless, he had forgotten to take off, and a long-caped coat of peculiar brown.

"My stormy night 'get-up,'" he explained; "a friend bought it for me in Edinburgh and tried to match my hair from memory," and if the "get-up" struck Alida as anything but professional she liked the wearer all the better for not caring.

"My throat is a little better," she announced, to make a final disposition of the coffee spoon episode, and Van Gaasbeck, flushing slightly, said: "I am afraid my mother was not very sympathetic."

"Of course she suspected me of shamming and said so frankly after you had gone; we had quite a little chat," Alida answered, lightly, and when the doctor had said "That's good," with evident relief, the question of protection from the storm took precedence of everything else.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Edward Volkert upon the threshold. He had a knack of becoming suddenly the First Napoleon by putting his hat on sidewise, and this trick he now performed.

"There was a custom among our ancestors," he began, making an attempt to capture Alida's hand for purposes of chaste salute, but being repelled, he turned toward Van Gaasbeck.

"Hoot, Mon!" he said, in compliment to the cap. Then the ladies, already warmly wrapped up, put on rubbers in a corner.

"Be sure they come up high," Volkert called to them; "the snow is knee-deep now and coming down in chunks. The Eighth Street cars are blocked, and they had to leave a loaded truck in Union Square."

"Did you see all that from the minaret?" Alida asked across her shoulder.

"Oh, I didn't climb the minaret to-night; there's too much fun outdoors."

Outside the atmosphere was like a fog with thickly falling snow, and an east wind from a winter sea swept the corners clean and piled the sheltered places high with drifts. The air was cold and clarified and tasted on the lips like sparkling water.

Kenilworth Place was so still as the four conspirators stole up the area steps that one could hear the muffled sound of car gongs from Broadway, two blocks distant. But on Fifth Avenue, when they reached it, there were more people than at noon—boisterous people who shouted and blew horns and pushed one another into snow-banks; quiet people on their way to mid-night church; colorless people who dislike to be in bed when others are awake. It was as though the year's death were something to be glad of, as though the New Year in its first sinless seconds might bring a benediction.

Alida thought it considerate of Van Gaasbeck to offer her his arm, and there was a dawning domesticity in the act that amused her, but she resolved to change the order of procession when occasion served.

"Have you made your New Year's resolutions yet?" he asked, when they were well under way.

"No, not yet," she answered; "I shall wait for the inspiration of the very last stroke of the bell."

"But is not that a little risky?"

"Oh, no, I believe in giving Providence every chance, and besides, there is always 'controlling one's temper' to fall back on. Tell me yours, I'm sure they're excellent."

"One is," replied the doctor, "magnificent. I am going to kill off half my patients."

"How noble!" cried Alida, with approval; "are you going to poison them?"

"No, I shall take the surer way of turning them over to whoever wants them. I am resolved to charge so much henceforth that those who don't pay anything will be doubly gratified."

"But how about those who do pay?"

"I hope that one of them at least will in future neglect his duties without my aid," said the doctor, and Alida, remembering the thumb of Mrs. Young's domestic, understood.

Behind them Bell and Edward Volkert laughed like children. He, in his favorite formula, was asking why a last year's almanac was like the harvest moon and kindred idiocies which she found most amusing, for never in her life had Bella Junior felt so young.

At the elevated station there was something of a scramble and the party lost its personality

to become part of a migration. It was by sheer good luck that on the arrival of a train they found themselves directly at a gate.

The car was packed with noisy pilgrims, who clung to straps and to each other and to the icy platform railing, shouting derisive farewell to those who had been left behind. Bell and Alida had seats resigned to them, the doctor found a place to hook his cane, and Volkert, less cautious, swayed alarmingly at every curve.

The expedition now took on the aspect of an informal social function, in which the burden of entertainment rested impartially on all. Persons with a sense of humor made known their gift, and girls who liked to scream indulged themselves at will. A band of college boys sang something loud and rollicking. The catch words of the day were bandied to and fro. Before Bleecker Street was reached the fat man who kept the door from shutting was forgiven, and at Chambers Street a belated Jerseyite found willing hands to help him through a window. At Rector Street the gateman made a joke.

"Trinity! All out for the Pneumonia Ferry!" he cried, whereat the college boys began to cough in chorus.

The narrow station platform overlooks the churchyard, and here there was a moment's silence, an unconscious catching of the breath,

perhaps, at sight of that last white meadow of New Amsterdam, where the brown church stands mothering her graves at bay. Through the stillness came the first sounds of the chimes:—

"CAPUT APRI DEFERO
REDDENS LAUDES DOMINO
QUI ESTIS IN CONVIVIO."

and it was not necessary to know bell Latin to understand the message—Feast and praise God.

Somewhere on the steps Alida managed to push Bell ahead while she herself held back with Volkert, and as they climbed the slippery street—the Arcade is not open late at night—anxiety to keep together was the one thought uppermost. Now the scattering stream of people began to condense and close together until movement was no longer a matter of individual volition. At Broadway the crowd extended from the high railing of the churchyard to the granite feet of great financial Gibraltars opposite. From Pine Street above to Exchange Place below, and far down Wall Street to the Treasury there was massed the population of a principality. As the moving multitude of faces in the strange violet electric light confronted her, Alida clutched Volkert's arm more tightly. The noise was deafening, for those who were not blowing horns were shouting, singing, laughing, and protesting. Nobody was silent an instant. It was impossible to stand

still. Eddy and counter-eddy passed each other, impelled by resistless, purposeless impulses, and the four were caught and carried southward to the door of the Empire Building, then north again. As they turned they became sensible of the storm, of the great wind bellowing overhead, and the lash of driving snow. Now they were far out in the roadway, with slippery iron tracks beneath their feet, now nearly at the curb, first one side and then the other. A yellow car stopped to disgorge its load of new arrivals, and when it moved again the crowd was driven back upon itself. In a lull the bells were heard once more, far off in the black sky:—

"REDDENS LAUDES DOMINO!"

Alida heard a gong clang just behind her, and when she turned her eyes were blinded with a flash of yellow light. Somebody called "Look out!" and she was lifted from her feet, pitched forward, buffeted, and hurled somewhere out of danger; and when she breathed again she and Volkert were in the shelter of the granite column of a bank, but Bella Junior and Van Gaasbeck were nowhere to be seen.

Volkert had been most efficient in his efforts to protect her, but now that she was safe he was laughing. He had acquired a horn and sounded a blast upon it. He had become as a dancing dervish in his sympathy with the tumult. When

Alida asked him what they had better do to find their lost companions, he replied, optimistically, "Oh, just wait here till they come along. Say, ain't this great fun?"

She did not think it was great fun, but kept the opinion to herself, while her eyes searched everywhere for Bella Junior's red last winter's hat.

"ADESTE FIDELES. OH COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL, JOYFUL AND TRIUMPHANT."

Now a new diversion, a new terror, sprang into being spontaneously in several places. Young men formed prisoner's chains, and hands on shoulders single file, headed by a stalwart leader, forced ruthless passage through the crowd. In such a way the college boys went past shouting a music hall refrain, and presently the thing became a craze that even women and girls took up.

"See that big fellow coming this way?" cried Volkert, in excitement, as a burly Irishman opened a pathway for his train of noisy followers. "That's Rooney, captain of the supes at the Alhambra, and that's the Chinese army after him!"

"I should think they might be Boxers," commented Alida, not impressed. Her veil had become unfastened, and her feet were numb with cold.

"OH COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL, JOYFUL AND TRIUMPHANT."

"Break away there or I'll run yez in," proclaimed the threatening voice of law, but the Chinese army did not quail. Alida shrunk into the shadow, but the eager face of Volkert, stretched forward into the light of an arc lamp, was a shining mark.

"Say, look what's happened!" cried Mr. Rooney, captain of the supes; "here's the burgomaster"; and his celestial retinue took up the cry, "Here's the burgomaster! Make a place for Dutch!"

It was evident that Dutch was favorably known at the Alhambra, and Mr. Rooney made a place for him, which place was that of a human snow plow to make clear the path. In vain did Volkert protest, using all his strength of lung to plead responsibilities, and all his strength of arm to grasp the granite pillar; the Boxers captured him brutally and bodily and bore him struggling away.

There follow other breaches of the peace that it is the humor of the crowd to magnify. A hansom cab attempts to gain a favorable position, but the horse's head is caught and turned aside, and the vehicle plunges down Exchange Place, followed by the howls of democracy triumphant. A private omnibus, filled with people from a theater

supper, is ruthlessly sent back amid a shower of snow balls and a bellowing of horns.

Alida is frightened for the moment, finding herself alone, but presently the hubbub becomes an established condition to which her mind adjusts itself, and indignation against Volkert forbids her to admit herself less safe without him.

She blamed him more than he deserved for the exuberant spirits of his friends, and she blamed herself more justly for putting too much confidence in an untried champion. But the problem now was how to recover Bell.

They were, in the event of a separation, to have met in a restaurant in Fulton Street, which makes a specialty of wonderful things in chafing dishes at unusual hours; but she did not know if Fulton Street was up or down, and she had not listened to the name. Now, by an unforeseen catastrophe she should not only miss the festivity herself, but by her absence, prevent it altogether. Thus nerved to action, Alida started boldly from her refuge, in quest of a brown overcoat and a red last winter's hat.

There were a thousand men and women all about her who would stand by her if she should need them, and there were policemen and conductors who had ever been her willing vassals. Surely the very graves of Trinity would stretch

a point should a Van Wandeleer meet with peril in New York.

Alida allowed herself five minutes for the search and then, if unsuccessful, she would take a Broadway car and so make close connection with Mary and the cook who would be coming back from midnight mass. The plan, though not attractive, was highly feasible. She tried to shape her course directly for the point where she had last seen her companions, reasoning that there they would also look for her. But though every one was disposed to give what aid was possible, the strength of the opposing currents was too great, and when, after persistent effort, she felt her foot upon the curb, she was before the Martyr's Monument, a full block too far north.

Here there was sudden order, and the police were hurriedly forming people by ranks of four into a long procession, moving slowly southward past the church. What the underlying purpose was Alida could not divine, but the arrangement gave her breathing space and an opportunity to look about.

They took the people hap-hazard as they came, making random combinations and strange quartettes. It was like a child's game, or a grotesque cotillion in which a big policeman, white with snow, was leader. Alida's place was next the railing and beside her moved a portly Ger-

man with his wife and child. She felt the little Teuton grasp her skirt and looked down, grateful for the small friendliness, while it began an endless story in its own peculiar jargon.

"I guess you think he's got an awful cheek," remarked the mother, apologetically, and when Alida had disavowed the thought she learned that the family resided on the twenty-sixth story of a building of which the father was janitor, and that they looked forward to mounting the stairs to bed. On the left arose the babel of the street, now coming to a hideous climax; on the right the snow fell silently among the graves. She could see a new light just ahead, and judged that the bronze doors of the church had been opened, though the gates must still be closed, for nobody went in.

"PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW,
PRAISE HIM ALL CREATURES HERE BELOW."

As the shuffling regiment advanced in fours the police maintained within its ranks an almost reverent silence. If one so much as raised a horn some stout official club was there to strike it down. Suddenly this silence became universal. One could almost hear the arc lights sputter in their violet halos, the ice wreaths rattle from black trees upon the graves. Far off a dull roar of steam whistles filled the air as Hoboken called to Harlem that the looked-for moment was at

hand, and Harlem passed on the word to Hunter's Point. From the river came the pipe of tugs, the deep-mouthed bay of liners. Staten Island was awake, Gravesend proclaimed the message seaward. Fog bell and ferry bell, church bell and fire bell swung together, and then the great bronze bell of Trinity, conservative to the last.

Alida was at the church door, standing where a soft light fell across the snow. Far within, across a vista of unlighted nave, a hundred candles burned upon a marble altar. The church was dark and empty. No worshiper knelt there nor was there any sound of song or prayer, only a great light shining in the dark. She caught the iron grille with both her hands to hold her place an instant, and standing thus she heard the first stroke of the hour. The janitor and his family had gone on, others went by behind her, hurrying now for the show was nearly over. Sometimes a hat was lifted, sometimes the sign of the cross was made. Eight, nine, ten—now was the time, if ever, for her resolutions, but she had forgotten them, even Providence did not seem inclined to accept her challenge. Eleven—there was some one beside her, close beside her. Twelve—some one was speaking to her: "I think your friends have gone on, Miss Van Wandeleer."

"Oh, where are they?" she cried, turning with greater interest in the intelligence than in the speaker, though it was a relief to hear her name from any one.

"They must be half way down the block by now."

"Together?"

"Yes, hand in hand, a lady and a gentleman and a little boy, I think that they were talking German."

"Oh, I was not with them, I was with—"

Alida paused, realizing all at once that she was speaking to Cousin Caroline's mysterious visitor, he of the long gray coat and heavy shoes.

"I saw that you were lost," he said, "when I first caught sight of you a few moments ago, then I hoped you had been found, and then I feared you were about to be lost again."

"No, I have been hopelessly lost for the last half hour," she replied. "I ought to have gone home at once, but I am very glad I didn't. Is not the chancel beautiful? Was it not wonderful, coming on it so suddenly in the storm?"

As she turned again toward the lighted altar he stood beside her silently.

"GOD REST YE MERRIE GENTLEMEN, MAY NOTHING YOU DISMAY."

"Come," he said, softly, "they are putting out the lights," and the policeman who had been

thus far very lenient urged: "There, get a move on, friends, don't block the way."

"Did you expect to see anything so beautiful?" she asked him, as they "got a move on."

"Indeed I did not," he answered; "as the light came out across the snow it was like something Hans Andersen might have dreamed but could not write."

He did not say on what particular object the light had fallen most effectively, and it was not until afterward that she knew.

"Hans Andersen wrote about tin soldiers and parlor ornaments and green peas," she protested, allowing the conversation to take its course. If one is to converse at all with persons who have not been properly introduced, the subject of fairy tales is as good as another.

"Yes," he assented, carelessly; "and Snow Queens and that sort of thing."

"Please help me look for a lady in an old red velvet hat and a gentleman with a brownish yellow overcoat," said Alida, hurriedly. She could not quite remember what the Snow Queen was remarkable for.

"Did you say the coat is brown?" he inquired, looking about obediently.

"Yes, yellowish brown; an acquaintance bought it in Edinburg to match his hair; it's very long."

"The hair?"

"Oh, no; his hair is very short and he has on a funny little cap."

"Your friend should not be at all hard to find anywhere," he said, encouragingly; "I suppose you did not agree on any particular place of meeting?"

"Yes, but I don't remember where it was. You see I left it all to Mr. Volkert; I never thought of losing him."

"And shall I look for Mr. Volkert, too?"

"I don't care to find him, I would much rather go home alone. I begged him not to speak to the Chinese army and he did everything he could to attract their attention."

"He behaved very badly," her companion answered, gravely, "in speaking to any army you disapproved of, especially a Chinese one."

Alida had had a vague hope that the appearance of Bella would make a fuller explanation of her difficulties unnecessary, but now she must explain, and the story being somewhat complicated, lasted until they had reached the corner of Rector Street.

Here the procession, of which they were part, broke from its order to mingle with the rush for homeward trains. The din had broken out afresh, but with diminished ardor, as hilarity gave place to other emotions. The instinct of

self-preservation was asserting itself, the inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness, the survival of the most aggressive. The pushing, jostling mass that filled the roadway from the summit to the elevated railway gave a suggestion of what might be expected at the narrow station steps.

"Stop a moment," said her companion, holding Alida back; "there is generally a better way than following the crowd, and I am sure there must be now, only I don't happen to know it."

"We might go a little farther down town and you could put me on a Broadway car before it reaches the crowd," suggested Alida, conscious of metropolitan cleverness in the familiar stratagem.

"A good idea," he assented; "and when you are safely aboard I can wait for the next car."

"Please don't do that," she answered, coldly; "I only meant that I was not afraid. With so many people about, nobody knows that all the rest are not one's near relations."

They trudged on silently for a moment, taking the street to avoid the greater press upon the sidewalk. Presently she said: "We must cross over for the up-town car."

They had come now to where Exchange Place falls rapidly to Broad Street and the labyrinth of granite cañons about the stock exchange. The

crowd had lessened sensibly, though there were many who had taken the same steps to circumvent their neighbors. When the car came it seemed best to allow others to push in, until it was crowded to the steps, and they saw it take its northward way without them.

"The next one is sure to be quite empty," Alida prophesied, "and it will be here in a moment, they run so near together." She was afraid she had not been very polite about going home alone and in her heart she was glad that she had not to do so.

Alida's moment passed in silent expectation, but it brought no car. They could see a yellow light far down toward Bowling Green, but it was apparently standing still. Another moment passed, and several more, but the light did not advance.

"A block!" said some one, and thereupon everybody said, "A block!" And there was the despair of old experiences in the word.

"How long do you suppose that it will last?" a woman asked, and a man, who could not possibly know, guessed half an hour.

"It's more than likely to be an hour," put in a third, and a fourth more pessimistic still opined that the block would last all night. As he spoke he started hurriedly toward Rector Street, followed by most of the others.

"Don't you think it would be foolish for us to go now with the car just in sight?" Alida asked, timidly, for she felt her leadership to have been so far anything but successful.

"By all means," he replied, in a tone showing clearly that he harbored no resentment. "I remember once wading through a stream up to my neck and coming out not fifty yards from a bridge. Since then I have had an eye for bridges."

Alida laughed politely. "I suppose that was in the West," she said.

"Yes, in Colorado."

"You must find New York very different," she remarked, absurdly glad that he was not displeased.

"A little," he assented, laughing. "So different that I sometimes feel like a Big Horn sheep in a flock of Southdowns. You who know every stone in the city, I suppose, have no idea what it is to be a 'tender-foot.' "

"To be a what?"

"I said a 'tender-foot,' but that does not mean anything here," he explained. "It is a wild and woolly term for a person who does not know where all the street cars go to."

"Oh, that is nothing," she answered, with a touch of patronage; "I don't know all the cars myself. Besides," she added, "one gets to know all those little things so quickly."

"There are several little things that I have learned already, Miss Van Wandeleer," he rejoined, mysteriously, and Alida, being tempted, said: "One of them seems to have been my name."

"Yes, that was the first. But you must not give me credit for more astuteness than I have. A strange lady kindly supplied the information one evening as you were leaving a theater. 'See, there is Miss Van Wandeleer,' she said to one of her party. It was just before Christmas, after 'The Cat and the Fiddle.'"

"Oh, yes, I saw that with the Brisbanes," said Alida; "but how did you know whom she meant?"

"I think she used an adjective," he answered, and Alida was troubled lest the adjective had been "red-haired."

"I trust that one has not been your only discovery in names," she rejoined, rather neatly as she thought.

"Yes, that is all the luck I have had," he answered, laughing; "but don't you think it encouraging? Let us move closer to the buildings out of the wind."

In the more sheltered place he said: "I fancy I shall learn my own name in some such accidental way. I do not mean, of course, from a stranger, for I shall have to meet people, hundreds of people, perhaps, before I come across

the right one. I may even have to go into good society, and if you should see me there I trust you not to betray my sinister purpose."

"I promise to be most discreet," she answered, heartily, emboldened by the prospect of other and more conventional meetings. Somehow she felt the difficulty to be less hopeless than he had represented it, and the sense of having known him, or some one very much like him, before at some forgotten time came over her with puzzling certainty. Of one thing concerning him she was thoroughly convinced; he was not in the least afraid of her.

"And when shall you begin?" she asked.

"I'm not quite sure," he answered; "as yet I know nobody at all."

They were almost alone now, for the disappointed patrons of the surface line had gone over in a mass to the elevated party, where there was a revival of horns and singing.

"I think," said Alida, "that is I am almost sure, that if we were to go down this street a block or two we should find the Fourth Avenue cars, and they would be almost as convenient as the Broadway."

CHAPTER VII

THE YELLOW SLEIGH

The snowstorm which had been an accessory at Trinity, a by-play, a swarm of dancing moths for every light, a contribution of confetti to the carnival, was in Broad Street the one thing evident. The market place had submitted to it, cringed to it, feigned death before it.

It was a city of silence they had come upon, a city of the palaces of sleep, under whose columned porches the light flakes swirled and clung as in a forest, and where, through gates of bronze and iron, only the wind passed in and out. The buildings fading into mist seemed immeasurably high, the vistas infinite. Somewhere to the south where the old canal had wound toward the river, there was a warm light near the ground, perhaps a sailors' drinking shop. Everywhere else the light was green and violet and came from the electric lamps swinging mysteriously in air. To the north the classic façade of the treasury, where Washington in bronze, takes an eternal oath, stood out in strong relief.

"Really, I don't know where we are," she cried, presently, looking about her in bewilderment.

"I think," he answered, standing still, "that we are in the center of the world, the very heart of everything. But I also think that we had better get away from here as quickly as we can."

"Yes, I am afraid I was mistaken about the car," she confessed; "but which way shall we go?"

"Back to Broadway, but not up that hill again."

"Let us make for Wall Street. I know my way a little now."

"It was very stupid of me," said Alida, remorsefully; "I must have got Trinity and St. Paul's confused; you know there are a lot of cars very near St. Paul's."

"It's a perfectly natural mistake," he said, by way of consolation.

"You don't think that at all," she cried, provoked by his complaisance.

"No," he admitted, frankly, "I do not; I think the joke is decidedly on you."

Alida bit her lip but she felt herself in no position to contest the point, and when he went forward, treading down the snow to make a path for her, she followed meekly.

"If I go too fast, sing out," he said.

Presently they crept close to some railings to avoid the drift; then they were forced to plunge through the drift itself and out again. A few

steps further on Alida took advantage of a small, wind-swept oasis to retie her veil, and while she did so her companion drew her fur about her ears, with that invincible contempt for small conventions which she had both resented and accepted at their first meeting. The next start brought them into a level waste of snow, knee deep.

"Keep in my tracks," he cautioned her across his shoulder.

"I am trying to," she panted; "go right on."

The next ten feet seemed a hundred yards, the next a furlong, and conditions on ahead were not more promising.

"How many miles of this trail are you equal to?" he asked, turning to face her.

Alida was standing still, for the wind had wrapped her skirts so tightly about her that her feet had for the moment ceased to be means of locomotion. He was at her side directly, his large fur glove beneath her elbow for support, while she perforce clung desperately to his arm to keep erect.

"Please spin me to the left," she said, trying to laugh, though her confidence in herself was ebbing fast.

She began to tremble and her small teeth clinked together nervously, and there came over her a humiliating fear that she might cry. But

she recalled, with a dismal sense of fellowship, the stories she had heard of people lost in the snow in mountain passes or upon the prairies, even at the Pole, and perhaps it was a memory of their usually cheerful endings which gave her strength.

"I am not tired in the least," she declared with outward bravado and an inward suspicion that her voice sounded weak. One disadvantage of a death by freezing is the difficulty in distinguishing its symptoms from those of perfect health, but Alida, taking the benefit of every doubt, plunged bravely forward, tottered upon the insecure footing, and nearly fell. She would have fallen had he not been there to catch her, and in another moment he had lifted her in his arms and was carrying her to where the path was clear again.

"Please don't, I am too heavy," she protested, feebly, but he only said: "Hold fast, we've had enough of this."

Once more upon her feet, she found herself above the drifts upon some marble steps blown clear of snow. The distance they had traversed from Exchange Place was scarcely half a block.

"Are you cold?" he asked, placing himself between her and the wind.

"I am either very cold or very warm," she said; and added, with conscientious regard for facts, "and I am just the least bit sleepy."

"It's pretty late," he answered, "and you have been wandering about an hour; the thermometer is about thirty and I scarcely think—"

"You are making fun of me," she interrupted, throwing back her head defiantly. "You think I have not got a bit of pluck."

"Don't let us exchange impressions here," he remonstrated; "I should be sorry to hear what you think of me as a pathfinder. When we go on I promise to do better; I must have fancied myself on Laramie Plains."

"I suppose the girls out there don't mind snow at all," Alida speculated.

"There are no girls out there," he answered; "just a few savages like me."

She did not reply to this, but announced an intention to sit down and rest, and he brushed a place for her on the step with his fur glove.

"You can only have a minute," he cautioned her, "so make the best of it."

Alida Van Wandeleer, sitting in the early hours of morning beneath the portal of the New York Stock Exchange, allowed herself the luxury of a moment's complete indifference to circumstances. She was very tired and far beyond the hope of overtaking Bell. That young lady was probably now experiencing a purple quarter of an hour on her account. Mr. Volkert was possibly looking for her at the morgue. The

very desperation of the situation soothed her. Presently she would make an effort and get back to Broadway, she and the gentleman from Laramie. The cars would be running again then, and everything would be well. The snow was never very deep in Kenilworth Place, never deep enough to justify heroic measures. One thing she was determined should not occur again.

"Wouldn't it be nice if a cab should come along," she remarked, with indolent folly.

"There is something coming along," he answered, looking down the street.

Faint at first but every moment louder came the sound of sleigh bells, large sleigh bells jangled out of tune. They were coming up Broad Street from the river, they were waking the echoes in the granite banks, they were bringing back the older echoes of Fraunces's Tavern and Federal Hall, and the brick-stepped gables that had flanked the old canal. Pearl Street woke up to laugh and Beaver Street remembered. At Wall Street a ghostly warden of the gate reached yawning for his pike, for there was a fine for being out so late. The Mills Building looked over at the Stock Exchange, the Telegraph Building to the Morgan Bank. "What new thing have we here," they seemed to say. "To-morrow shall we sell electric traction short?"

As Trinity was ringing the half hour, the cause

of the disturbance came in sight. It was a yellow sleigh, of a pattern long since obsolete, high in the back and curving in the front, where the upturned runners ended in two eagles' heads. The motive power was a stalwart horse, that wore, with ostentation, bells enough for two, and the driver was a stout old gentleman so much wrapped up that only his white beard announced his age. He sat alone upon the forward seat and a second seat behind was vacant.

"Oh, is he not a perfect picture of St. Nicholas!" exclaimed Alida in delight, but her companion had started forward and was already at the curb.

"Good evening, sir," she heard him say, and the driver drawing rein replied with a like civility.

"Don't you want to do an act of humanity by taking two belated travelers as far as Broadway?"

"Well," said the other, cautiously, "I don't know that I do, and I don't know as I do." He appeared to think the antithesis satisfactory. "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for you, apparently."

"I rather like your cheek."

"It is not cheek, sir, I assure you, but dire necessity. Of course I should not expect you to put yourself out for nothing."

"What will you give me?"

"Anything you ask! Five dollars—ten!"

"Have you got the money?"

"Yes, see here."

The old man looked carefully at the tendered fare as though to be certain of its quality before he said: "I don't want anything, my friend, except an evidence of good faith. Whereabout do you live?"

"We want to go to Kenilworth Place, and if you would drive us to the Broadway cars—"

"They're blocked—tied up for keeps. That lady there your wife?"

"No, and she is very anxious to get home. We were listening to the chimes, you see."

"So you came down here to hear them better! That's right; that's the way I was once myself."

The old gentleman chuckled at his own discernment. He appeared to be an amiable old gentleman, and not pressed for time.

"You see, I don't know the streets down town," the other began, in explanation; but Alida, who was now beside him, interrupted. "It is my fault," she put in, justly; "I expected to find a Fourth Avenue car here; it was very foolish."

"Not a bit of it, young lady," returned the driver, still facetious. "Why most people come to the Stock Exchange expecting to find Elijah's Chariot. If you can put up with my old sleigh,

hop in and Sport will hustle you wherever you want to go."

"I am sure you are very kind, indeed!" exclaimed Alida, hesitating.

"You must not let us take you out of your way," added her companion.

"I won't," replied the owner of the yellow sleigh, composedly; "but my way is any way; when a fellow gets as old as me he don't much care so long as it's a good road and good company. Young man, if you'll just give them robes a shake you'll find there's plenty more underneath."

Alida made herself very comfortable on the high-backed seat, and her host directed the operation of tucking her in with paternal interest.

"A girl will forgive you almost anything but letting her get cold," he said, oracularly; adding by way of personal information: "I've got a granddaughter most as big as you."

"Don't she like sleigh-riding?" Alida asked, divining that interest in his young relative was expected.

"I guess she likes the riding better than the sleigh," he answered, with another chuckle. "Last winter we went through the park and when some fellows called out, 'Hello, Santa Claus,' it sorter hurt her pride. Everything all tight back there?"

Everything was all tight, and Sport, who was not a patient animal, started briskly to the sound of his own discordant music.

"That there is George Washington," remarked the driver, pointing with his whip to the statue on the treasury steps.

"Yes," assented Alida, who had by this time remembered something of her former visit, "and that is where he took the oath as first President, is it not?"

"That's right," the old man said, approvingly, "but it ain't all young folks nowadays who know that much. Ever heard of Diedrich Knickerbocker?"

"Yes, he was Washington Irving."

"Correct, young lady! Go up head! Now listen; old Diedrich rode once in this very sleigh just where you're sitting."

"Did he, really?" cried Alida in delight. "Did Washington Irving ride in this sleigh?"

"That's what he did, and no mistake. He hired it from my own father and drove to Fordham; he and old man Paulding. I used to hear they got spilled out coming back, but then you never could depend on pop."

"How very interesting; I shall remember this drive as long as I live."

"So'll I, I guess, but then I ain't got more'n a century to do it. Ever read the History of

New York?"—There is only one History of New York.

"Oh, yes," said Alida; "I am descended from nearly everybody mentioned in it!"

To one who did not know Alida the speech might have sounded vainglorious, but in truth she spoke as unaffectedly as one who being on the planet Mars might say, "On Earth I was an Anglo-Saxon."

"Is that so!" exclaimed the driver, turning about with interest. "Don't think me curious, but I am; what's your name?"

Alida told him modestly, and added that her mother was a De Wint.

"Good names," he said, in comment; "first-class names; you must be related to old Jacobus Van Wandeleer and to Peterus De Wint."

"Yes, he built a mill near Union Square. It was burned by the Indians in 1639, but of course you don't remember that."

This was not exactly what she had meant to say, but the laughter of the gentleman at her side prevented explanation, and the other, hugely gratified, laughed too.

"Don't be too sure of that," he chuckled, "a feller as old as me don't count a hundred years or so as much."

"I suppose you have lived a long time in New

York," suggested the passenger, who till now had been content to listen.

"I don't know as I'd call it so long, looking back," the driver answered, "but I've been here seventy-nine years next March, and every one of them in the old First Ward."

"Indeed! there must have been a great many changes in that time."

"Changes! I call 'em landslides. I was born and raised a sloop-painter down near Corlears Slip. We used to pull the boats right up most to the kitchen door, and now the river's two blocks off."

"What happened to the river?" asked Alida, scenting a catastrophe of which she had not heard.

"They built a bulkhead," he replied, laconically; adding, after a moment, "it spoiled the painting business, but it wasn't bad for real estate."

"Do you live there still?" Alida asked.

"Yes'm, and I've got the littlest house and pay the biggest rent (figuring space and interest on the value) of any one in the whole town. My folks all want me to go uptown where I can die in style by electric light, and have an elevator to hist the undertaker up, but I tell 'em I'm nothing but a wharf rat and I like the smell."

They were plunging now through narrow

Nassau Street, and Sport, as he broke the road, shook the snow from his large ears, and tossed his head with unfeigned elation. Pine, Cedar, Liberty Streets were passed, then down the hill to Maiden Lane and up again to Fulton Street.

"That used to be the Vly Market down there by the river," said the sloop painter, indicating the direction generally. "Vly means marsh, or swamp, you know. I've got no patience with folks who call it the Fly Market; there's no sense in it—but, pshaw, them that used to argue over such things is mostly dead now. Some day there won't be anybody left who cares a durn."

"Oh, yes, there will," replied the other man. "There will be always somebody to keep alive the old traditions, and to make new ones for themselves. I'm sure your father thought the Astor House an innovation, and to-day there are thousands who would mourn to see it torn down."

"Do you understand that?" Alida asked, turning to him in surprise. "Do you understand that any one can really love New York?"

"I do myself for one," he answered.

"But how can you?" she protested; "you have been here such a short time, and most strangers think there is nothing in New York but theaters and department stores and noise."

"Oh, I have come across several other things,"

he said; "besides, please don't forget that my family came from here; I'm rather proud of that."

There was a moment's silence as the wharf rat steered his course around a drift at Ann Street, which feat successfully accomplished, he turned suddenly to ask, "And what might you call yourself, young man?"

"I call myself Anthony Bogardus," replied the young man, laughing that the question should have been so aptly framed.

"Dutch, too! as Dutch as schnapps. Dominie Bogardus married Anekje Jans. Maybe you've been down to Trinity looking after your estate. But don't put off your wedding till you get a title—Whoa there, Sport! Steady, old man, we're driving the aristocracy—I used to know a Bogardus who was a purser on a steamboat. He used to sift the money through a ladder and the company got every cent that stuck. No, come to think of it, his name was Rinkout—when a feller gets as old as me he don't remember names. Bogardus was a broad-faced boy with freckles, who would rather fight than eat, and he and I had a set-to once on old Pier Seven."

"How long ago was that?"

"Oh, more'n sixty years. His name was Tunis."

"That was my grandfather's name," remarked the gentleman who called himself Bogardus,

"and he had the same attractive qualities. Do you recall what became of your young friend?"

"No; I lost track of him. He lived uptown somewhere by St. Mark's, and just came down about the docks to look for trouble. His mother was a widow woman, and when she died he struck for out West. That's the way with all of them."

To Alida, who had been listening with breathless interest, the sudden exit of the broad-faced boy was disappointing, and her views of trusting to chance for information underwent revision.

"I hope St. Mark's is an exclusive neighborhood," said her companion, in an undertone.

"Oh, very," she assured him; "the De Wints all go there when they die."

"The De Wints owned a bowerie next to my mother's great-great-grandfather, Peter Kiersted," put in the old gentleman, whose hearing was remarkable. "But some fool ancestor sold it for sixty dollars an acre."

"We sold ours for beaver skins," rejoined Alida, with a touch of pride.

"I can't go further back than old Pier Seven," said the descendant of one belligerent, modestly, "but I shall put up a tablet to commemorate that fight."

"Then you can put me in as winner," chuckled their host.

"Yes, I will do that with pleasure, only you haven't told us your name yet."

"Well, you can just put on Douw Aukes; that's good enough to be forgotten by."

They were turning into Printing House Square, where far overhead the lighted windows of the newspaper offices glowed like a fleet of fire balloons, and opposite, a misty moon, the clock upon the City Hall indicated dimly that the hour was a quarter to one.

"Alderman Aukes, I used to be, when old Fernando Wood ran things to suit himself across the way," went on the old gentleman, with a motion of his whip toward the low, white building, "but now I'm nobody in particular. They did once call me judge, but that was foolishness, because I was defeated; and sometimes the young fellows down in South Street call me the Last of the Knickerbockers."

"But don't you like to be called that?" Alida asked.

"Oh, I take it as a compliment all right," answered Mr. Aukes, "but it's sorter sad to be the tail end of even a good thing."

"Why, isn't that a Third Avenue car?" cried Alida, as a red conveyance shot past. "If it is we had better take the next. It won't be very far to walk across."

"What's the matter? Is Diedrich Knickerbocker's seat uncomfortable?"

"Oh, no, it's perfectly delightful, only—"

"Sure you haven't got anything against the seat?"

"Oh, no, indeed!"

"Well, have you got anything against me?"

"No, Mr. Aukes, you have been so kind I—we can never thank you enough."

"I ain't looking for thanks, I'm looking for company," replied the former alderman. "I guess likely this is going to be my last ride. When a fellow gets to be as old as me he can't take chances, so I started out right off as soon as the New Year struck. This makes seventy-six years of sleigh-rides, for I missed the four years of the war, and you'll be the first girl I ever drove out without taking safe back to her own door."

"I won't be that," Alida answered; "you will have to drive me now to Kenilworth Place."

"Good!" cried the alderman. "We'll be there before you know it. I'll take you by the road your grandmothers used to go. Wake up, Sport, and shake yourself; we're off for Bowerie Lane."

CHAPTER VIII

IN BOWERIE LANE

Once on the beaten thoroughfares the old horse seemed to catch the spirit of the night, the large bells jingled deafeningly, and the yellow sleigh plowed through impeding hillocks with the indifference of a Maasdam lugger for a Channel sea. They crossed a labyrinth of tracks, taking the side toward the Hall of Records to avoid the salted, sloppy entrance to Brooklyn Bridge, which opened in long arcades like some pale grotto of the moon peopled with infrequent, hurrying shadows, and so bore northward into Center Street.

"Tombs, to the left," announced their host, "and even that's rebuilt. You wouldn't think there ever was a lake here, the Collect Pond that Fulton tried his steamboat on. At the outlet used to be the 'Kissing Bridge'—I never heard the toll was legally repealed—but they've got the Bridge of Sighs now in its place. A fellow could write a piece of poetry on that if he knew how, couldn't he?"

"You ought yourself to write a book on ancient customs, Alderman," suggested he whose one authenticated name was Anthony.

"Oh, there's too many books already about them, and mostly wrong," replied the ex-official, settling himself comfortably. "I used to follow up the chaps who wrote, but I never got thanked for it. Why, there was a time when folks who wanted to join societies came to me to find out who their grandfathers were. This here is Chatham Square where Wolfert Webber's tavern used to be."

"And what was that celebrated for?"

"Oh, dances, principally. Way back in sixteen something—when a fellow gets to be as old as me he don't remember dates—they used to drive out here from town and in from out of town and have a dance and go home early—the earlier the better, it gave them more time on the road. In those days girls weren't in such a hurry to get home. The sleighs were strung out all the way from here to Peter Stuyvesant's pear tree, and now me and Sport's the tail end of the show."

Perhaps Douw Aukes accentuated the pathos of his position needlessly, an accepted privilege of age, but Chatham Square, even on a snowy night, can stand a little glamour, and it was excusable that he should swerve slightly from the course from time to time for picturesque effect.

The sleigh, now turning sharply to the left again to avoid some bare ground beneath the elevated railroad station, sped up a squalid,

crooked street where faint lights, green and red, burned over narrow doorways. From the iron-work of overhanging fire escapes swung long red banners bearing Chinese characters, and even through the snowy air came whiffs of incense and strange, intangible odors. A door opened noiselessly and closed again, as though whoever had intended to come out preferred to do so when the street was deserted. Once a yellow shade was drawn aside and a grotesque face peered down at them.

"This here is Chinatown," said Aukes, "just smell the dope!" To a solitary policeman swinging his club beneath a lamp he called: "Hello, Joe, are all the side doors closed?"

"Say, Rip Van Winkle, aren't you dead yet?" returned the official, genially. "Go back to bed and sleep another hundred years."

"That's Joe Brennan," chuckled Mr. Aukes, but he did not explain why Joe was interesting. "Excuse my talking all the time," he added, "I always was a hand to talk; but then you ain't obliged to listen."

"Oh, but we love to listen," Alida protested on behalf of both, which was fortunate if true, for Mr. Aukes, when not turned half around toward his guests, was ever on the eve of turning, and intercourse between them had so far been confined to very hurried glances of amuse-

ment. Once when Anthony pulled the robes more tightly about her their hands had met by accident, and once to call attention to some object on the sidewalk she had struck him gently with her muff. When some men, emerging from a cellar, shouted witticisms, inspired by the yellow sleigh, she drew unconsciously a little closer.

"I'm sorry there ain't more to see," said Mr. Aukes, regretfully; "there was a time when it wasn't safe to show yourself here at night."

When they had passed again beneath an elevated railway structure, a broad street stretched before them northward, glowing with lights.

"It is not bedtime here at all events," commented Anthony.

"The Bowery sleeps with one eye open," chuckled Mr. Aukes; "she knows her business." And the business of the Bowery appeared to be connected with noise.

A train flew rattling overhead half hidden in a cloud of steam; an electric plow went down, reaping the whirlwind and leaving high banks of soiled snow in its trail. There were surface cars at intervals, filled with passengers, and many shops, where lights were burning behind iron grilles, had a deceptive air of being open. Somewhere a New Year ball was going on with music and the rhythmic tread of many feet, but on the

sidewalk muffled men skulked singly along the narrow, beaten trails.

The alderman's reminiscences now grew more modern, and he had a new one for every block. Here there had been a mighty fire in the fifties, and Number Nine had flooded Number Four; there Forrest had played the Gladiator as it would never be played again; but driving requiring closer attention, there were intervals wherein the others might create memories for themselves.

"O, Bowery Gals, are you coming out to-night?
Are you coming out to-night, coming out to-night,
Oh, Bowery Gals, are you coming out to-night,
To dance by the light of the moon?"

chanted Douw Aukes, keeping time with his feet in the straw, but his guests did not regard him.

The yellow sleigh was comfortable, the sides embraced one protectingly, and the back was high enough to rest the head against. The snow flakes indicated by their size a rise in temperature and the wind had ceased to howl. It was no more the rollicking storm of Trinity, or the invader of the Stock Exchange. Those were old weathers now, blown seaward, old memories; or perhaps—the cushions of the yellow sleigh were soft—perhaps snows still unfallen, still to come to earth like the whirling plow and the flying train seen with prophetic vision dimly through the winter mists of Bowerie Lane.

Alida, snug in her corner, with the white back of Douw Aukes before her and the white back of the large horse, knew that every moment brought her nearer to Peter Cooper on his monument. Behind him was the Institute, to the left the German playhouse that had been a place of other worship; further on the Philadelphia shop; Grace Church, and home. It was all like an amusing though ill-constructed play, with the last act well advanced without some very necessary explanations.

"And how did Miss Van Wandeleer enjoy her last dance at the Tavern?" her companion asked her, bending a little—just a very little—closer. "I thought the waltz would have been more enjoyable had Wolfert Webber been less stingy with his wax."

"But you forget that waltzing is not invented yet," returned Alida, laughing; "we do not even know the lancers."

"Well, then, how did Miss Van Wandeleer like the olekooks?"

Alida shook her head in disapproval.

"That won't do either," she objected. "I am sure our ancestors did not speak of olekooks. It would be like asking 'how did you like the salad?' Could anything be more greedy? No; they would talk about the people who were there."

"But you see I did not know the people. I am a new arrival from the frontier."

"Then you should begin at once and tell me your adventures."

"That would be taking your interest for granted."

"Oh, if we are to pretend the party, you might pretend that, too."

"And may I?"

"Yes, you may pretend that I am very much interested. You may pretend you are my cousin whom I have not seen for years, and that I don't know anything at all about you except that your grandfather had freckles and a bad temper."

"Yes, a frightfully bad temper," he agreed, and went on, hurriedly, for he, too, felt Peter Cooper imminent—

"'Are you coming out to-night, coming out to-night,
To dance by the light of the moon?'"—

"but my grandfather was progressive in his way, for he sent his only daughter back East—to New Amsterdam, to school."

"To Fulham Priory?"

"That is only a guess. Well, she stayed there for several years, and just as she was ready to go home—back to the cattle ranch—she changed her mind and ran away and married a gentleman whose name is still a mystery to the only person who cares one way or the other what it was.

Afterward, almost immediately, I fancy, they traveled two thousand miles in search of forgiveness, and then, I fear, met with an inferior quality of that article. But it made very little difference after all, for within the year the husband was killed by falling from his broncho at a round-up, and the daughter died leaving a little boy of no age at all."

Alida made no comment but listened, leaning forward not to miss a word.

"That's all," he said, with disappointing brevity.

"It can't be all; you have not told me why the husband kept his name a secret, or why the father did not like him, or what became of the little boy."

"He did not keep it a secret at all, only by the time the boy grew old enough to ask questions the grandfather had moved to another ranch in another state. He was a cattle man, you know, and a Boer of the Boers, and always ready for a trek to more promising grounds, and the boy grew up among people who neither knew nor cared who he was. The old man's reasons for disliking his son-in-law were, I have always believed, those of a gentleman who would rather fight than eat, and he was very angry because some Eastern relatives did not take kindly to the match. There were hasty letters, I believe, at

first, and then he simply dropped the whole connection. To his grandson he would only say that he was better off without relations, and at such times his language was most forcible. That was the cause of their final quarrel, for the boy did not like being called a 'maverick,' which, by the way, is the name they have on the ranges for a steer without a brand, so he took himself off to the mountains."

"To Oro City?" Alida's memory was excellent.

"Yes, there and to other places, until the old man died."

"What happened then?"

"Then he—this interesting boy—found himself the owner of more cows than one person could possibly have use for, so he came East to sell them, and incidentally to find out who his father was. But he found instead a make-believe cousin who was good enough to make believe she was not bored to death."

"'To dance by the light of the moon,'"

sang Douw Aukes for the twentieth time, a trifle wearily. Then resuming his sidewise position, he said: "Don't let me interrupt, but ain't there more than one house in Kenilworth Place?"

They had come to Peter Cooper now, and Aukes had memories of Peter, to which the others listened with attention; conscious, perhaps, of past neglect in the matter of attention

and perhaps willing to allow the story to remain part of their game of pretenses.

At Astor Place they learned the northern boundary of the Vauxhall Gardens, at Clinton Hall, reincarnate, the causes of the Dead Rabbit riots, but all that followed Peter Cooper was by way of anti-climax, and perhaps the old man realized it, for he cut his narratives shorter and passed in silence several buildings about which he knew interesting facts.

"Mr. Aukes," Alida said, when Broadway brought the time of reckoning near, "I am sure you have done a great many kind things in your life, but you have never made any one more grateful than I am for being brought home to-night."

"Pshaw, that's nothing; when I was a boy we had a society, and the constitution and by-laws were just 'Lend a Hand.' When a fellow's as old as me, he's found out there ain't nothing better than them three words to keep the backbone limber."

"Thanks, Alderman, we'll paste them in our hats," said Anthony.

"That's where most folks sticks 'em," laughed the alderman, "so they can take 'em off and hang 'em up just so soon as they get indoors. I used to be a great hand for making up mottoes to paint on canal boats; there's one I know of

floating round the Erie Basin yet, it's 'Go it while you're young—and keep young.' How's that?"

"I am going to paste that in my hat!" cried Alida laughing, gayly, forgetful that so near the Ruggles' stoop a greater measure of caution would have been more prudent.

"They're building girls on the same old model yet," said Alderman Aukes. "Whoa, Sport, I guess this here is as near as we can get. Young lady, me and Sport present our compliments and wish you both a Happy New Year!"

As they stood together in the snow once more Alida called, "Good night, Mr. Aukes, a Happy New Year and a thousand thanks," and the old man waved his whip in token that he heard.

They saw the high back of the old sleigh flash yellow for a moment under a gas lamp, and presently the loud old bells grew faint around a corner. Then it grew still in Kenilworth Place, so still that one might almost hear the snow flakes falling, gently now, magnifying the iron railings into balustrades and outlining the branches of the one ailantus tree against the silent night. Everywhere the surface lay smooth and untrodden except where the yellow sleigh had passed, and where a track led from Fifth Avenue to the Ruggles' steps and up to the front door.

"I thought that Bell would be watching for me," said Alida, looking up despairingly at the five tiers of lightless windows, and forgetting in her disappointment to remember that she had no key. It was unusual for Miss Van Wandeleer to come home after nightfall without conventional protection, and she had never been so late that Cousin Caroline had not happened to be awake. For a moment she experienced the chilling sensation of being shut out. For a moment, until her companion remarked with cheerful satisfaction: "You are evidently the first of your party to get back after all. There is only one track on the steps and that was made by a man."

"Oh, are you sure?" she asked, in great relief.

"Yes, he was a young man and in a hurry, for he ran up two steps at a time, and the trail cannot be five minutes old."

"It must have been Mr. Volkert."

How true were these deductions presently appeared, for even as they spoke the front door flew wide open and Edward Volkert dashed violently out.

"Thank God!" he cried, with histrionic fervor at catching sight of her; "I have been well nigh mad!"

"Please don't shout so, you will rouse the neighborhood," she said, ungratefully. "What is the matter?"

"Matter! I thought you lost forever."

"It was hardly your fault that I am not," she answered, coldly.

"Don't blame me for that till I explain," he went on, breathlessly. "I could not get away at first, and then the cops got hold of us and took us to the Church Street station, where they let us go again. I ran right to the elevated and saw Van Gaasbeck and Miss Ruggles getting on a train, and I thought I saw you with them until at Eighth Street they got out alone. Then I dodged them and came here to see if you were home by any chance. I went to your room and tapped on the door, but you were not there, so I was going back to Trinity—"

"Where is Bell now?" Alida interrupted, shortly.

"Somewhere between here and Eighth Street station. We were stalled three times coming up. They'll be along directly."

"Edward Volkert," said Alida, frigidly, "do you want me ever to speak to you again?"

"I know I don't deserve it," he admitted, with deep contrition.

"No, you don't, but I shall overlook this evening, and for the present I shall not say a word to Bell of what has happened; she has enough to worry her just now."

It is to be hoped that Volkert was duly grate-

ful. Under the circumstances he could do nothing less than stand apart discreetly.

"Do you think that I am doing right?" Alida asked of the other man who waited. "I only want to have a chance to think things over."

"You are right to drop one factor altogether," he replied; "to-morrow St. Nicholas and his sleigh will be a dream. To-morrow the Snow Queen will have melted."

"Suppose she does not want to melt," whispered Alida, impulsively. Here on the Ruggles' stoop, with Edward Volkert standing guard, she felt a desperate wish to hold the dream a little longer.

"Won't you let me help you?" she added, recklessly. "Won't you let me 'lend a hand'?"

"Only to say good night," he answered, laughing. For a moment her small, damp glove lay snugly in his large, furry one. Then he had lifted his hat and was plunging through the snow toward Broadway.

"Say, who is your friend?" inquired Edward Volkert.

"Open the door," commanded Alida, none too graciously, "and do not speak to me again to-night."

CHAPTER IX

STERILIZED MILK

Miss Caroline De Wint, upon the first day of the year, in preparing the Annual Report of the Sterilized Milk and Linen Lending Guild, found herself confronted by a problem; should the division of succor by recipients result in quarts or babies?

"I should think," suggested her god-daughter, who was assisting, "that the milk ought to go into the babies."

"No," argued Cousin Caroline, thoughtfully; "you are wrong, because you see—oh, here it is on another piece of paper. Miss Toll has figured it all out exactly: 'Average daily distribution, fifty-six quarts and one pint. Average of individuals relieved, fifty-six and one-half!' "

"I suppose the pint was for the half individual," observed Alida, whose mind was not upon statistics.

They were seated on either side of a marble-topped table, before the soft coal fire in Cousin Caroline's room. And Cousin Caroline's bed, obligingly upon its hind legs so to speak, having assumed the semblance of a preposterous cabi-

net, the room had taken on the character of a parlor.

"I never had the slightest faculty for figures," remarked the treasurer of many guilds, closing her portfolio with a sigh of satisfaction. "When my accounts are short I always make them balance with an anonymous contribution, but when they come out the other way I don't know what to do. Give me the minute book, Alida, please."

Alida rose and fetched the thin, black volume.

"How did you ever get along at school?" she asked, without resuming her seat.

"Oh, well enough; we used to sing the multiplication table to Anglican chants, and there was always some girl in the class who liked doing sums and let the others copy. They did not then expect young ladies to be book-keepers."

"That was at Fulham Priory, was it not?"

"Yes, I never went to any other school. Your mother used to boast that at Miss Van Hoevenburg's the girls knew fractions, but I must say I have never perceived any evidence of it since. Just look for the meeting of December 10th and see if the Linen Committee made a report."

Alida found the place and looked. "There is nothing here like a report," she said.

"Well, there should be. I must have forgotten to write it down, but never mind, I'll ask

Miss Toll. We can't do anything more just now."

Alida, resting the book upon the table, turned the leaves slowly, as though she sought for something between them, while her godmother debated in silence how best the next half hour might be employed.

"I suppose you were not at all interested in what happened at Fulham after you graduated?" Alida speculated, idly. "I suppose you never went back there again?"

"Yes, I spent a summer there, the summer following my father's death. I loved the old place and the old ladies, and they were glad to have me."

"Of course the pupils were all at their homes in summer."

"No, not all; there were always one or two who lived too far away to go home."

"From the South, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And from the West?"

"I really can't remember where they were from. What difference does it make?"

"I was only going to ask you," said Alida, boldly, "if by any chance there was a girl there called Bogardus."

She was conscious that her attempt to lead up naturally to the question had been clumsy, and

was prepared to have her reasons for it asked, but she was not prepared to have her godmother turn sharply upon her.

"I should think, Alida, that you would know better than to mention that name to me," said Miss De Wint.

"But really, Cousin Caroline," Alida protested, with contrition, "I had no idea—"

"In future," returned the other, shortly, "you had better have an idea before you ask stupid questions."

Alida closed the minute book, and going to the window, stood looking out. At the cost of giving her godmother offense she had obtained a scrap of information, and she had also learned that whatever there might be to know even she was supposed to know it. But the obvious dislike of Cousin Caroline for the former pupil could hardly be due entirely to the loss of a geography. For a wild moment she thought it might be her duty to make the knowledge known to one whom it concerned, but it was a very wild moment and quickly past.

"I think I shall go out a little way," she said; "the weather is superb."

"I should, by all means, if I were you," returned her sponsor, tartly. "Of course it is New Year's Day, and the streets will be filled with disreputable characters as well as being blocked

with snow, but those are small matters to a modern young lady. It is a pity you have not a club, Alida, you might—" Cousin Caroline hesitated for a fitting climax—"you might play billiards."

"Oh, New Year's is just like any other day now," replied Alida, turning from the window, "only there are fewer people in the street. I shall walk up Fifth Avenue on the quiet side, and perhaps drop in to tea with Bessie Brisbane."

"The next thing, I suppose, you will be having a cowboy bring you home," rejoined Miss De Wint, with spirit. Which shot, though fired at random, struck near enough to cause the target some disquiet.

Half an hour later Alida, descending, perceived Edward Volkert in the lower hall. His day had been spent in mastering the contents of the newspapers, more especially those advertisements promising largest returns for the smallest investments, which would seem a harmless pastime for one possessed of less than one dollar in available assets.

At sight of Miss Van Wandeleer he ran up several steps toward her and stood barring the way with extended arms.

"Toll!" he announced, "one 'yes' or 'no,'" which was a game they had played before and involved a monosyllable in answer to any ques-

tion the toll-keeper might propound, under a heavy penalty for refusal.

"But I am not going to speak to you," she protested. "I have not forgiven you yet."

Edward Volkert laughed a scornful laugh.

"Oh, yes, I know I ought to be ashamed of myself," he said, "but you were very much obliged to me last night, all the same."

"Let me pass immediately!"

"Toll!"

"Well, what is the question?"

"Was that Bradish Osterhout who brought you home?"

"No!"

The answer was emphatic, more so than she had intended it to be, and Volkert starting back, exclaimed: "Whew! Baby's got a tooth!" and in revenge he sang, as he went up the long stairs, a little rondel of his own composing, reserved for purposes of annoyance:—

"Oh, if sweet Alida
Would let me sit beside her!
Oh, if she would hide her
Little hand in mine."

Which was undeniably rude in Mr. Volkert, and brought forth from an opened door the merited rebuke: "Edward, be silent!"

Mrs. Valentine Van Wandeleer sat in her favorite chair before the parlor fire, the *Times*—folded

into a hand screen—neglected on her lap. Her dainty cap was of lace in honor of the day, and old lace at her throat and wrists replaced the customary linen bands. She was a woman who had learned the art of looking younger than she was by dressing older than she need, and to-day she had put on her finery with special thought, for it was with her the festival of All Souls.

Decanters stood upon the piano and beside them in a lordly dish some long cakes molded into patterns and savory with caraway seed. But though some of these had been broken and several of the glasses used, it was from the embers that most of Josephine's callers had made their bows. To her these visitors had been the real ones and the ghosts were they who had sipped sparingly of the waning sherry of Chancellor De Vos.

Near the decanters and the heavy silver dish there rested an exceptionally large bouquet of orchids, most legibly inscribed to Mrs. Van Wandeleer herself; for K. O. K. began the year with aspirations to a widening market.

"Mother," observed Alida, taking a seat upon the piano stool and addressing herself to the ultimate bow of lace upon her mother's cap. "I don't suppose any one else will be here, do you?"

"No, no one else," sighed Mrs. Van Wandeleer, softly. "There is no one else to come. We had two less than last year, did we not?"

"Yes, two. Judge Gansyourdt and old Mr. Van der Mark. Last year he brought a box of candy, you remember."

"Yes, I remember. He had done so for twenty years. He was a faithful friend, though one of the stupidest men I ever knew. Your father could not bear him."

Alida broke off a large crumb of New Year's cake and ate it in respectful silence in memory of the dead. Presently, recalling the pleasures of the morning, she asked: "Did you notice that Doctor Roorda had on a new cravat? He was really quite presentable. And Colonel Vanderlyn wore a pink carnation, but when he put on his overcoat he mistook it for a button and ruined it completely. I tried to make him accept an orchid in its place."

Mrs. Van Wandeleer took up the *Times* and rearranged its folds.

"Alida," she said, with greater force than it was her habit to put in words, "what do those orchids mean?"

"I really do not know; no one uses the language of flowers any more."

"You understand me very well, Alida; what does Mr. Osterhout mean?"

Miss Van Wandeleer moved uneasily upon her moving seat.

"I think *I* might ask you that question, mother," she replied, with an attempt at levity; "they were not sent to me, you know."

In the silence that followed Chancellor De Vos looked sternly at the mantelpiece, and the Lady with a Rose—attributed to Sully—simpered back.

"Is his mother quite impossible?" asked Mrs. Van Wandeleer at length.

"I have only seen her once. She is fat and furry, and says 'My dear' to every one. I am sure you would hate her."

Mrs. Van Wandeleer sought counsel in the fire.

"Sometimes we are given strength," she murmured, piously.

"I had some idea of taking a little walk," ventured Alida, after an interval, and her mother, not being aware that the idea had become sufficiently well defined to prompt a tailor-made costume, and Bazet's latest event in hats, replied: "I thought you were to help your godmother."

"We can't do anything more until Miss Toll comes back, she has the minutes in her head—besides Cousin Caroline and I have had a slight misunderstanding."

"A misunderstanding? What about?"

"I scarcely know. I asked her if she had ever met a lady named Bogardus."

"Oh, Alida, how could you have been so inconsiderate?"

"But I did not know I was inconsiderate. Please tell me why she did not like to be asked."

Mrs. Van Wandeleer held up the *Times* before the fire.

"I do not think we should speak of Caroline's affairs behind her back," she answered, quietly.

"But, mother, how am I ever to know?"

"There is nothing to know, child, nothing that concerns you in the least, nothing that was not over and done with before you were born."

"But, mother, I must know," exclaimed Alida, rising and crossing to confront her mother. Standing beside the high, black mantelpiece, with the firelight full upon her, she looked down at the smaller woman in the arm-chair, a figure of determination.

"Mother, I must know," she said again.

"Then ask your Cousin Caroline, and she will tell you what she thinks best. I won't discuss it. Run along now, dear, and take your walk. I have a headache."

Providence, who has given the porcupine its quills, the feeble snail its shell, had given Josephine her headaches.

"I'm sorry, mother," said Alida, softly. "Can I do anything?"

"No, child, I only want to sit and close my

eyes—Felice makes very pretty hats—you are more like your poor father every day—I wish it had been anything but underwear."

Alida, pausing in the hall to contemplate her hat with saddened satisfaction, wondered if anybody in the world was blessed with such unreasonable relatives as herself. They blamed her for not knowing things they would not tell her, and they refused to answer questions on the ground that she could have no concern in events anterior to her birth. How, under such circumstances, was it possible to lend a hand!

CHAPTER X

THE BLACK SLEIGH

Miss Van Wandeleer's reflections, as she climbed the sunny slope of Murray Hill, were of the nature to give brightness to her eyes and firmness to her step. The avenue was aglow with light and life and color, and the sparkling air vibrated with the sound of sleigh bells. Vehicles of every cast adaptable to runners passed in two lines between high banks of snow, and for once the aimless holiday wanderers along the sidewalks had something to amuse them.

Alida had abandoned the idea of lunching with the Brisbanes, and resolved to make the Brick Church the limit of her walk. But at the Thirty-fifth Street corner a sleigh more gorgeous than the rest stood drawn up against the curb.

It was a high, black sleigh, with high, black horses and pyramids of bells and streaming standards of red horse hair. Two menials in bear-skin capes sat motionless upon the box, and behind them Bessie Brisbane reclined alone in regal splendor.

A pretty girl was Bessie, with fine black hair

and large, blue, Irish eyes, a Kerry maid in sables, and they became her hugely.

"Hello!" exclaimed Alida, coming up. "You look like the Queen of Sheba in all her glory."

"Do I?" replied Bessie, showing pretty teeth; "well, I feel much more like Burnheimer's three-dollar pants. This band wagon is B. J.'s last addition to the plant. Is it not fierce?"

Alida, with her head upon one side, affected to examine the equipage critically.

"I think it beautiful," she said. "Quite the prettiest sleigh I ever saw. Is it new?"

"Yes, new and smelling of varnish like everything we have. Get in, you are an answer to prayer. I have been waiting here for any one I knew. B. J. bought this yesterday, and as usual he is trying it on the dog. Get in and help me be stared at."

Alida hesitated, but one of the attendant grenadiers, now on the sidewalk, held back a corner of the robe with automatic reverence. She was a little tired from the walk, and Bessie looked provokingly comfortable. Besides there was really no valid reason why she should not get in.

"Drive up the avenue," commanded Miss Brisbane, urbanely; "unless you have a more original suggestion," she added, to her guest.

Alida shook her head, contentedly. "Is not

the footman new, too?" she asked, surveying an unfamiliar back.

"Yes, and we have to call him Henry. The coachman is Moneypenny, which is bad enough, but this one's name is Love; we never have any luck in servants' names. Alida, what a stunning hat! I rather think you and I could pass most anything on the pike to-day."

"I am afraid we are a little bit conspicuous," rejoined the other, doubtfully.

"Yes, we're right in the limelight. Do you mind?"

"No, but don't you think we might go into the Park?"

"Yes, when we get there. We shall have just time for the obelisk and back. You are coming home with me to tea, you know."

"Oh, no, I am not."

"Oh, yes, indeed you are. B. J. has a holiday to-day, and don't know what to do with it, and there will be some other men, with nobody but mama and me to make things go, and I'm no good on earth with father."

"I never knew a girl less afraid of her father."

"Oh, I'm not afraid, but he sees through my humble efforts, and to-day I hope to be especially impressive."

"Who is to be there?"

"To begin with, Leigh-Watkins. Do you know him?"

"No, I have never met him—you mean the clergyman, I suppose?"

"Yes, he is mother's last venture in futures. The vicar of St. Jude the Obscure, and between ourselves, just a shade more Leigh than Watkins. Note that he needs snubbing, and needs it badly; but he is merely a prelude."

"A prelude to what?"

"To a party with a title," said Bessie, slowly and impressively.

"Your little diplomat, I suppose—'Vich is the reech von?'—You remember his delicate question when some one brought him up to both of us together?"

"Was he not a little beast!" assented Bessie, willingly. "Since then I have made him bite the dust for that on more than one occasion. However, this is not to be the diplomat to-day, but a lord—a real, live lord—with a coronet on his trade-mark, and a motto in bad Latin. You know 'Erbert 'Owlet, of course?"

"Yes, I have met Mr. Herbert Howlet. He danced with you at—"

"He called it dancing," corrected Bessie, sadly; "well, an uncle of his, Lord Wensdale by name, who has a way of doing unexpected things, arrived here yesterday on the Oceanic

without taking the trouble to inform his nephew that he even thought of coming. We had already invited 'Erbert to drop in to tea to-day, and last night he called to ask permission to bring Uncle Wen along. You see it is all quite accidental and unpremeditated, and not in the least a visit of inspection. There is somebody trying to bow to you."

"Yes, Mrs. Norris. What do you mean by inspection?"

"I mean **I** am not to be looked over to see if I will do."

"I should hope not," indignantly.

The sleigh, taking its place in the long line of vehicles, trucks, stages, hansom cabs, and other sleighs, moved slowly, but they had gone a block before Bessie spoke again.

"Don't you think it's fun to watch the people?" she said, as if in explanation of her silence, and added, as a second thought, "I want your candid opinion of Mr. Howlet after lunch."

"Then there is to be an inspection?"

"Yes, in a way, but I have no idea that he will do."

"Do, for what?"

"Ballast. That is what the Brisbanes stand in need of just at present. We are, as you may have noticed, slightly top-heavy, like this sleigh, and some day, if we are not careful, we shall have

an upset. We go on piling things too high. We put fur collars on our fellow creatures and call them our servants, but we know better and they know better and the horses know better. Some day I shall meet the eye of Mr. Moneypenny and laugh, or B. J. will offer the butler a cigar as he often threatens to do, and if it ever comes the slump will be complete."

"But Mr. Howlet?"

"Oh, he is just a possibility, like the statues B. J. has sent home to see how they will look in corners," said Miss Brisbane. A passing sleigh had tossed some snow into her lap, and as she spoke she made a little ball of it and looked about for a mark at which to throw. "But he is delightfully heavy," she went on; "he has not the slightest sense of humor; I don't believe he even sits down to laugh at himself when alone."

"That at least is something in his favor," Alida admitted, rather reluctantly, for she had never found Mr. Howlet's heaviness attractive.

Miss Brisbane dropped the snowball to the roadway and looked with affectation of distress upon her moistened glove. Evidently something had occurred to disturb Bessie's equanimity or she would never have wasted a snowball.

"Would you really, seriously think of marrying an Englishman?" asked Alida, with a look of searching inquiry toward her friend.

"Don't put it quite so baldly," answered Bessie. "I might marry an ancestral seat, or a position in the county, if he did not stutter."

"I never heard you hint at anything like that before."

"Oh, no, it's quite a new idea; it came to me in the picture store." Miss Brisbane flushed as she said this and fixed her eyes upon the back of Moneypenny. "I was looking at my own portrait in the Caporal exhibition, and somebody behind who did not know me, said: 'And who is this intended for?' 'Miss Brisbane,' answered the attendant. 'What Brisbane? Who are they?' I will give you twenty guesses at the answer."

"The Brisbanes of Park Avenue?" guessed Alida.

"No, nothing of the sort. 'Plain people from Peoria'! We have been running the show two years, regardless of expense, and that is where we stand in the estimation of a picture store man!"

"But that is absurd—"

"Perfectly absurd and perfectly true. They call us plutocrats if we have more than twenty people at dinner, and when things go wrong in Wall Street we are held responsible. But between times we are P. P. P's."

"I'm sure I should not mind what I was called," announced Alida, stoutly.

"But I am not like you, I have no traditions

to fall back on; I'm not a Knickerbocker. It is better to have ancestors who gave dinners and had servants and carriages."

"Bessie, you are talking nonsense," Alida interposed. "My ancestors did not have carriages, they had high-backed, yellow sleighs, and danced at Wolfert Webber's Tavern, and came home by moonlight across the 'Kissing Bridge.'" She checked herself, blushing under cover of the frosty air, and finished. "We were plain people enough in those days, I am sure. Your tradition theory is absurd."

"Oh, no, it's not," persisted Bessie, leaning back comfortably among the furs. "At least it gives you that sense of having been here first that puts newcomers at a disadvantage. Then, too, you are born knowing things we have to learn. The other day my small brother disgraced us by assuming the Hanging Gardens to be places of luxurious execution for the kings of Babylon, which shows the effect of lynching as a prenatal influence. Your little brother would never have said such a thing."

"I am afraid he would have been too stupid," Alida answered, laughing.

"Not at all; if he had been born on the prairies he would have taken to civilization like a duck to water. He would have even invented it for himself."

"Do you think so, really?" cried Alida, becoming suddenly interested. "Do you think a person can live all his life in all sorts of out of the way places and yet be kind and noble and considerate?"

"I don't think those are qualities of civilization," answered Bessie, turning up her nose. "I mean such things as knowing whether a picture can be worth ten thousand just because it does not look like you."

They had crossed the Plaza, and leaving the slower pageant of the avenue, had become a link in the flashing, many-colored chain that wound up hill and down and in and out between the elm trees. Borne on a keen west wind the light snow rose, hung sparkling in the sun, and fell in playful sifting showers. Bells, bells were everywhere. The pulses beat with them, the thought danced to the music of them.

"Oh, Bessie!" cried Alida, "aren't you glad you are alive!"

"Yes, rather," said Miss Brisbane, without enthusiasm; "but tell me something of that bridge you mentioned."

"Did you drive down to hear the chimes last night? You said that you were going."

"Yes, but we did not hear a chime. Everybody was cold and cross, and we had a frightful time getting home. I envied the people on the sidewalk."

"Then you were envying me without knowing it."

"I might have known you would be there," said Bessie, laughing, "just to see that things were started properly in New Amsterdam. I suppose you Dutch have mystic rites among yourselves that we outsiders know nothing of."

Across the Meadow and the Mall snow lay in unbroken drifts. The sky-line of tall buildings to the west was like a mirage city in a desert filled with strange, flying caravans. From everywhere these came with flashing red and gold, and the panting of horses and the mad merriment of bells. The footways were alive with people; men and girls, wrapped warm and booted heavily, spurred on by tingling blood to cover distances, ambitious only that something should be left behind and something reached that lay before; small brownies in hoods and leather gaiters, leaping and rolling in the snow like mastiff puppies; old men in fur, who took snow from the boughs of evergreens and tasted it, closing old eyes a moment to remember.

Miss Brisbane was unusually silent. When the subject of the chimes was dropped she did not suggest another, and Alida, while awaiting developments, contented herself with an occasional glance toward her friend.

There was a hardening of the lines around Bessie's pretty mouth that she had never seen there before, that she had never looked for there before, and it dawned upon her dimly that the friendship both had fancied firmly founded was after all a chance acquaintance of the road; that for every step of hers Bessie had journeyed seven leagues, and that their destinies lay far apart. Alida was in her orbit. As she was now another year would find her, morning or evening star in the appointed time, while Bessie moved on to some distant perihelion.

"Bessie," she said, a little anxiously, "don't you think you would miss all this dreadfully if you were to go away from it?"

Miss Brisbane laughed and cast a comprehensive glance about at the throng of serious people suddenly transformed to merrymakers; at the obelisk in the Sahara of a night; at the white city with its thousand wings of steam ready to fly again; at the sleigh that had been sent home yesterday.

"Of course I should be sorry," she replied; "but then I was sorry to leave Peoria. I am like poor papa, I only want the things I have not got. Turn here, Henry, and drive straight home. Now I should like to buy that picture store and burn it down! I'd like to buy that museum over there and burn it down."

"The Metropolitan?" Alida cried, touched on a nerve of civic pride.

"Don't be alarmed, I'd build another twice as big, which shows that I am becoming idiotic."

"It does," Alida answered, frankly, "and that you are what my godmother used to say of me when I would not eat string-beans—both wicked and ungrateful. I don't know any one who would not change places with you."

"Except Alida Van Wandeleer?"

"Oh, don't count me. I would not change to-day with any one who ever lived," replied Alida, laughing gayly.

"One might suppose that you had crossed that bridge you know so much about," observed Miss Brisbane, sagely, and the conversation after this grew rational.

CHAPTER XI

THE MARK *OF THE* DOLLAR

Ben Jonson Brisbane lay back against the cushions of a leathern arm-chair, his feet extended to the fire, his hands clasped behind his head, and his face upturned toward the massive panels of his library ceiling. But the attitude was no more one of relaxation than that of an observer who watches for the moment of eclipse.

He had his daughter's Irish eyes, and somewhere from a pack of shuffled nationalities he had drawn a Roman mouth and chin which he was vain enough not to hide. Even in the strong light of his sunny room his skin was clear and firm and wholesome, and his hair, in spite of half a century, clung to his head with virile crispness save where one lock detached itself and fell across his forehead.

This lock was characteristic of B. J., and in the symbolism of the comic press did duty as a dollar mark so often that its cultivation had become, in a way, a public obligation. It was expected of him that it should be there. It was the token by which strangers recognized him, and to his followers on 'Change it was an oriflamme. But to

the man himself it had once meant something more than a dollar mark.

Ben Jonson Brisbane—there had been court cards in the pack—had once believed himself a writer of realistic fiction, chained hand and foot to imaginative facts in a provincial jail-yard of journalism, until one day, apprehending the logic of events, he made a million dollars, by corner or concession—traditions differ—and discovered in himself a fourth dimension, a sixth sense. Some people, being blindfolded, can divine the north, and others know when they cross water running underground. B. J. knew when to buy and when to sell, and this was his explanation of himself, which being the true one found no general acceptance. Meanwhile, he remained as he had been born, a deviser of plots, and it was the clairvoyance of a Victor Hugo rather than a Rothschild that lighted in his Celtic eyes, fixed on the carving of his paneled ceiling.

So silent was the library that Bessie Brisbane and her guest, coming softly to it down the carpeted corridor, made sure B. J. must be alone if he were there at all, but at the open door they drew back, perceiving their mistake.

A girl of their own age was seated at a window in an attitude of attention, a pad of yellow paper on her knees, and a pencil in her hand, and when she, being less preoccupied than her companion,

looked up, Alida was glad to recognize Serena Schepmoes,—Serena, small and unobtrusive, her soft, brown hair drawn tightly back, and her eyes, a shade too near together, expressing only readiness—impersonal, mechanical readiness. The round keys of the open typewriter at her elbow expressed as much.

"What was that last?" inquired Mr. Brisbane, after a silence that must have lasted several minutes, and the other, reading from the pad, replied: "What we have most to guard against—"

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Brisbane, taking up the thread, and continuing in an even monotone, "What we have most to guard against is the sudden release of large blocks of Balkan now in conservative hands. We shall sustain the market in this and other directions, and any disposition to capitalize profits will be met by a sufficient decline to check further sales. It would be better, however, to keep things upon an even keel by a judicious balance of private tips and published denials which must be advantageous in the end to all concerned. Don't lose touch with Ajax for a moment, and if a certain presence seems advisable to both of you, wire 'Brig Mary Ann unloading at Commercial Wharf. Keep the babies warm.' That will be all, Miss Schepmoes, thank you."

Mr. Brisbane made himself a little longer in

the arm-chair, and laughed a laugh of quiet satisfaction.

"No, stop one moment, please," he said again. "This is a telegram to the same address. 'Sing Holland Juniper Klondyke.' Have you that?"

"Yes, Mr. Brisbane," replied Serena, repeating the cryptic words, and immediately the typewriter went into violent action, which the protesting voice of Bessie was powerless to disturb.

"This is a pretty way to spend a holiday," cried that young lady, coming up behind her father's chair. "If I were Miss Schepmoes I'd strike."

"Why, hello, Bess," said B. J., indolently. "We are not working, are we, Miss Schepmoes? A thought or two occurred to me—"

" 'Sing Holland, Juniper Klondyke,' " quoted Bessie. "Most charming little thoughts they are, I'm sure. Are not you going to speak to Alida?"

"Not the Princess Alida!" exclaimed Brisbane, rising with exaggerated haste, and to the visitor he murmured, as he bent over her hand, "I am your very humble servant."

"A Happy New Year, Mr. Brisbane," returned Alida, gayly, for the impetus of bells and frosty air was still upon her, and in the atmosphere of the splendid house the holiday took on new actu-

ality. "I hope you don't mind being broken in upon. It's all my fault; I've never seen this room before by daylight. How beautiful it is."

"Yes, pretty as a red wagon," he assented, laughing.

"It might have been designed and built in Pullman," put in Bessie, fervently.

"The highest art," went on her father, in accents of instruction, "is that which best interprets its own period, and Pullman stands for national aspirations in this year of grace."

"It stands for the Chicago limited," insisted Bessie, and her father laughed again, lightheartedly.

Resting his elbow on the high mantelpiece he threw back his head and brushed the dollar mark aside.

"And so do we," he assured her; "we stand for the Chicago limited, and what we lose on curves, we make up when we strike a tangent. Miss Van Wandeleer, your section is reserved."

"Dear me," sighed Bessie, in affectation of despair, "I feel just like that girl in Thackeray who said 'You'll find poor pa sadly vulgar.' And, oh, Alida, that reminds me—a nice old lady asked B. J. the other night if he had read 'Vanity Fair,' and he assured her that he had read it in the original! Wasn't it lovely?"

At the window the patter of flying hammers

and the tinkle of the little bell that announces when a line is nearly finished, ceased, and Bessie, as though she had been waiting for the chance, crossed to speak to Serena Schepmoes.

"Please show me how to make the ribbon go the other way," she said.

"Yes, in a minute," said the other, preoccupied with an erasure and the printing in of a correction, and not until this was finished to her satisfaction did she explain the small attachment at the side.

"You have to use more force than that," she said, when Bessie had tried and failed.

Presently Alida, too, came up and said good morning to the secretary, who returned the salutation with an expressive wink (which seemed uncalled for), and the lesson in mechanics was resumed.

"I love machinery," declared Bessie, wiping her fingers on a handkerchief worth a day's work at union rates. "I'd be perfectly happy if I could run a locomotive. Papa, did you ever run a locomotive?"

"No, daughter," answered Brisbane, "I've only fired one—a narrow gauge freight engine on the Blue Hill branch."

Oddly enough, as he said this a burst of flame from the wide chimney shone red upon his face. It was as though the furnace door had opened as

the rocking freighter buckled to the grade, but the cause of this illumination was a man in livery who knelt at B. J.'s feet to throw another hickory log upon the fire.

"Is Mrs. Brisbane in the par—rose room?" he inquired of the servant, making the correction with a knowing glance toward Alida.

"I think Mrs. Brisbane rang the elevator bell just now, sir," was the answer.

"Come, girls," said B. J., warningly, "you know what mama is when expecting company."

"Miss Schepmoes," said Bessie, "if you will waste your holiday by being here, you must take the consequences. Won't you come down when you are ready and help us?"

"Thanks," said Miss Schepmoes, with composure; "what's up?"

"Oh, nothing very exciting, some Englishmen are coming, and we are going to have tea and pretend that we like it."

"Lord Wensdale," put in Alida, in the hope of heading off a wink.

"Wensdale?" repeated Serena, folding her finished letters; "the Yorkshire family, I suppose. He must be about the third earl, the title is not very old."

"I never thought of their having vintages in lords," said Bessie, laughing; "I supposed they lumped them all together."

Miss Schepmoes, reaching for the envelopes, bent down her head. She found her employer and his family an endless source of satisfaction.

In the corridor, B. J. said: "I like our little friend Serena very much. She has a great dramatic future before her."

"She did think once of going on the stage," rejoined Alida, doubtfully. "Do you consider that a disadvantage in a secretary?"

"Oh, no, indeed, a great advantage; my last incumbent thought of going on 'Change. Whenever I dictated a letter I had to follow it with a contradictory one. The effort nearly killed us both."

"You know you loved to do it," declared his daughter.

Perhaps if Sardanapalas had undertaken the adornment of the Brisbane house with Fifth Avenue shops to draw upon, he might have found more places to put expensive things, but this is idle speculation. He surely could not have lavished treasure with a better will, and nowhere was this more apparent than in the rose room. It was like a foretaste of the eighth day of creation—that day of "Let there be roses" yet to come, and in the midst of it a frail and faded Eve stood making nervous, unimportant changes in the ornaments. Upon the entrance of Ben Jonson Brisbane and his two companions she

turned to them in evident relief. It was one of the terrors of Mrs. Brisbane's life that some day she might be called upon to face her guests alone.

Mrs. Brisbane, who was fair and spare, and short for the mother of so tall a daughter, had been pretty with a fleeting, New England prettiness. But accepting the "had been" with good grace, she gave her mind to the four unalterable tenets of a faith which held her husband to be the most brilliant man in the world, her daughter the most attractive woman, herself the victim of a complaint known as oppression, and Martini cocktails a reliable family remedy.

She had known adversity, and she knew prosperity—limitless prosperity. In the one case she had been mildly extravagant, in the other she practiced secret small economies to maintain her equilibrium. And her normal expression of placid bewilderment varied at times toward pained bewilderment or pleased bewilderment, as oppression or Martini reigned lord of her ascendant. Could an angel have whispered to her, "Rachel, you are doing admirably," it would not have hurt the angel's reputation for veracity, and it would have been a great comfort to Mrs. Brisbane.

"Oh, Miss Van Wandeleer, I am so glad to see you!" she cried, effusively; "I don't know what we should have done without you."

"Mama's idea of a pleasant party begins and ends with you, Alida," supplemented Bessie, taking a handful of roses from a silver bowl and dividing them with perfect fairness.

"Ben, please don't go away again," pleaded Mrs. Brisbane, suspecting an intent to avoid responsibilities as her husband moved toward another door.

"I sha'n't," he answered, reassuringly; "I am here to amuse the company, especially the Princess Alida, to whom I shall now exhibit the entire collection, beginning with room A."

"But you must stay in here!"

"By no means. Would you have them find all the talent in a row like a Merry Thought Quartette? Bessie, reason with your mother while Miss Van Wandeleer and I discuss the fine arts."

"Alida, don't let him escape," said Bessie, "and bring him back when you smell muffins."

"I shall expect you to explain everything," said Alida to her host, as they passed into another and a larger room, the pervading tones of which were those of Flemish tapestry.

"No," he answered, lightly, "it is not often that I get in this particular part of the limited myself. My place is further on ahead."

"In the smoking car," she suggested, remembering a mysterious haunt of men.

"No," said the former stoker, laughing, "in the cab."

As her guide seemed little disposed to linger over several objects well worth looking at, Alida protested.

"You are not showing me anything," she said.

"There are only two things here I want to show you," he rejoined. "Two pictures; one that I think rather good and one that I am sure is horribly bad. Which shall we take first?"

"Whichever comes the first."

"That happens to be the good one. Here, just above your head. Come this way a step and tell me what you think of it."

Alida took the required step and stood a moment looking silently at one of the most puzzling compositions she had ever seen.

"It is St. Martin of Tours and the Beggar," she said at length; "he is in the act of taking off his cloak to divide with the other."

"I see you know the legend," said B. J.

"But, Mr. Brisbane," cried Alida, taking a wider range of the canvas, "they are in Madison Square. Surely those are the lights of the garden through the trees. And there are modern people all about, and in the distance, hansom cabs. Let me have a moment to take it in."

As the moment passed, and others, the motif of the picture seemed no longer fantastic, but

plausible and possible, almost convincing in its realism.

"It is wonderful," Alida said, at length. "I do not know which to admire most, the artist's truthful rendering of night and mist and melting snow, or his daring in introducing those two figures in the full electric light. Who was he?"

"Oh, a boy I used to know. He once sold papers on the Illinois Central, but he went to Paris afterward to study art and got a lot of medals, married a French girl, and bought a château on the Loire. He sent me this one day for old times' sake. That's all the story, but I thought the picture might appeal to you. Shall we go on to the other?"

"No," she replied; "I have not yet seen enough of this."

A carved gold chair stood beneath the picture, and on this Alida mounted, giving little heed to its gobelin covering; her eyes were nearly upon a level with the painted faces.

"Come, that is not allowed!" exclaimed B. J.

"Then you should not have left out part of the story," she answered, when she had sprung lightly down, and B. J. of many deals turned red—red as St. Martin might have turned had he been detected—much redder than he turned himself when the dollar mark artists had been especially clever.

When they paused again at the further end of the long room, Alida, looking up at a large, dark picture, asked, "Is this the bad one?"

"No, that happens to be a treasure; some day when nobody is about I mean to scrub it with sapolio. The bad one is the little fellow underneath."

The little fellow, a water-color, and unquestionably deserving of its ill-repute, was a view of sepia mountains beneath a cobalt sky, with a torrent in the foreground of a green most often seen in maps. A positive line traversing the mountain side terminated near the center in what appeared to be a spot of ink.

"The mystery about this," began the guide, "disappears at once when we learn that the line is a railway, and the spot intended for the entrance to a tunnel. A German draughtsman made the sketch, and I valued it as a reminder of how undeserved successes sometimes are. But, come to think of it, the story would not interest you in the least."

"Oh, I am sure it would!" exclaimed Alida; "I must hear it."

"Then let us sit down here, that is, if you can smell muffins at so long a range."

"No, but I can see Bessie at the tea-table, and she will be certain to make a sign. Tell me about the railway and the tunnel."

They sat at opposite ends of a carved and gilded sofa, blood brother to the St. Martin chair, and too high for a person of Alida's length of limb to touch the floor. Even B. J., in his corner, clasped his hands about one raised knee for comfort. His poses, which when set in gobelin, suggested æsthetic affectation at times, were in truth the easy attitudes of one who rests on bales of freight.

"You must know," began the narrator, "that at one time several railway companies were anxious to extend their lines across a mountain range. Some of them built tunnels and others switchbacks till every pass was pre-empted and every possible way of getting over taken up, and the little road in which I was interested was, to all appearances, left out in the cold."

B. J. spoke so pathetically of his little road that Alida's sympathies went out to it at once.

"I thought it was all up with us, but in spite of the engineer's reports I undertook a forlorn-hope exploration on my own account. One day, while following a most unpromising trail, I found myself overtaken by nightfall, and came upon a lonely cabin."

"I am sure it is going to be a ghost story," Alida interrupted.

"It would have to be in fiction," he admitted, seriously, "but this is only plain, improbable

fact. It was just an ordinary miner's cabin, ten miles from anywhere, but there were two remarkable things about it."

As B. J. paused here for mock effect, Alida clapped her hands in mute applause.

"Two very remarkable things, considering the place," he went on, slowly, "a cow—an Alderney if I remember rightly—which grazed on a small plateau where the grass grew abundantly, and a young man who sat in a hammock and read Browning."

"I believe you are making up the story as you go along," Alida said, ungratefully.

"Indeed I am not," he protested, laughing, "and I have not come to the most interesting part yet. The young man turned out to be about the best fellow I ever ran across, and the cow was a dream of infancy. Of course I stayed there over night, and paid for my keep with good advice about the quartz vein he was working on."

"I thought he was reading Browning."

"So he was, while waiting for a partner who had gone thirty miles to buy powder—blasting powder, you understand. And incidentally I may say that the partner never came back."

"Why not?"

"Possibly because he found some more promising enterprise, and I cannot blame him very much when I recall that vein of quartz. It was

white and beautiful and clear as ice, but there was not a fleck of gold to be got out of it except in theory."

"But don't you think the partner behaved very badly?"

"Perhaps he was not fond of Browning," said B. J., charitably; "we should not judge too harshly. That evening by the fire my host and I fell naturally into swapping troubles, and when he heard mine he laughed."

"I thought you said he was nice."

"He was, and that is why he laughed. The next morning he put me onto something all the rest had overlooked; a place where a tunnel could be bored right through the mountain to a gulch upon the other side not half a mile from where we were. You will understand how much this meant to me, when I tell you that it is to-day the best and shortest route between the valleys and the plains."

"Was not that fortunate!" cried Alida, more gratified by B. J.'s confidence in her intelligence than impressed by the *dénoûment.* "And what became of the miner?"

"Of course, our company would have given him anything in reason, so we made a bargain that he should have the right to any quartz veins we might discover in our tunnel. But there did not happen to be any there, so in the end he got

nothing, and I made more than I deserved, both in fame and money. Rather shrewd in me, was it not?"

"I don't believe you treated him unfairly," said Alida, stoutly.

"It is a fact, all the same," said Mr. Brisbane, "that the man who saved our scheme got nothing for his pains. I wish the picture were a little bigger, it would make such a team with St. Martin."

"I won't believe it," said Alida, rising. "See there are people in the rose room, and Bessie is holding up a muffin."

CHAPTER XII

MUFFINS *AND* ALLIGATORS

"Shall we break in on them, or wait for an effective cue?" B. J. whispered to Alida, as they paused within the shadow of a rosy curtain to survey the group.

The rose room party, now increased in size by three male visitors and Serena Schepmoes, had managed to make the worst possible distribution of itself. Mrs. Brisbane strove to entertain Lord Wensdale under a daughter's alert and disapproving eye; Mr. Leigh-Watkins, who ever regarded Bessie with distrust, assisted that young lady with a spirit lamp, and Mr. Howlet, openly anxious to take the vicar's place, occupied a distant seat beside Serena.

"When we were at Nutley Abbey," observed Mrs. Brisbane, drawing inspiration from a cherry in the bottom of an empty glass, "Bessie found fault with me for asking if they intended to rebuild; but I was perfectly right, for in less than six months they wrote us for a contribution."

"I see. We'll soon not have a decent ruin left," lamented his lordship, who evidently supposed Martinis should be sipped like port.

From the vicinity of the spirit lamp there came a milder voice.

"The parish building is to be of brick and terra-cotta with symbolic figures above the door."

"How many pieces?" asked Miss Brisbane, her tongs suspended over the sugar-bowl.

"Twelve," said the vicar, simply, "arranged in a semi-circle."

Across the room, Serena said: "My grandmother used to visit the dowager duchess of Perth."

"Really!" answered Mr. Howlet, without enthusiasm. "Beastly old frump she must have been."

"Enter the Princess Alida," whispered B. J., "followed by villain who gives glad hand to duke."

But it is never fair to judge a company by fragments of disjointed talk, and there were much greater conversational possibilities in the rose room than might be supposed at first.

Mr. Leigh-Watkins—his cloth entitles him to precedence—was a good-looking young man, who hyphenated opposing tendencies as he did his name. To Alida, catching the infectious raillery of B. J., he suggested a polo player who had put on sacredotal raiment for a lark. His hair, short, crisp, and red—the shade was almost

primary—repeated itself in heavy eyebrows and a neat mustache, and when his brown eyes took on a pastoral mildness one felt one ought to be amused.

Howlet was tall and spare, with a long mustache made longer by much pulling; his method of expressing thought began commonly with a low hoot suggestive of a sudden pain, and his favorite articulate word was "really," which adverb he had trained to surprising conversational feats.

Lord Wensdale, also tall, was broader than his nephew, and amiability personified; he would have been most agreeable had he not labored under two illusions; that all American humor was amusing, and that most American remarks were humorous. For the rest he had black side whiskers closely trimmed, white teeth, and a guileless smile, and he said "I see" quite often.

But to Alida, whose advance impressions had been received from Howlet through the mediumship of Bessie, Lord Wensdale was a distinct surprise. He did not seem at all what is implied by the terms "rum old chap," "queer old Wenny," or even "jolly good sort." He was an active gentleman of forty or thereabout, with a marvellously good opinion of himself, and a shrewd habit of estimating persons and ideas as they presented themselves. If Bessie had really

meant what she said in the sleigh—but then did Bessie mean it?

Mr. Brisbane had, on entering, gone directly to where his wife was engaged in deadly converse with Lord Wensdale. Drawing a light chair between them, he sat down and began at once with some suggestion challenging animated discussion, which soon set all three laughing heartily. It was remarkable how the faded little woman brightened and acquired confidence under her husband's protecting wing, and what really clever things she either said or seemed to say. And later, when the earl told Alida that Brisbane's wife must have been a great help to him in his career, he said it with complete sincerity.

Alida herself had borne down to the relief of Bessie.

"Let me make tea now," she said, "as every one has had some it is of no consequence how badly I do it."

"All right, if you insist," said Bessie, rising with alacrity. "Let me introduce Mr. Leigh-Watkins, whose management of spirit lamps is really miraculous."

Alida bowed and so did Mr. Leigh-Watkins. He was standing and held a plate of muffins by request with much the same quality of good will with which a poodle holds a pipe.

"I have heard so much of you, Miss Van Wandeleer," he murmured, casting about him for a place to put the muffins.

"But very little to my credit, I'm afraid," returned Alida. "Put them in the rose bowl. But please give me one first, that is, if you don't mind seeing me eat it."

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure," said the clergyman, referring to the act rather than the spectacle.

"But don't you think it would be kinder if you were to take one, too?" went on Alida, "and between bites you can tell me all the disagreeable things you have ever heard about me."

"Ah, that would be too delightful," he replied, not knowing that it would be years before he could again taste hot butter without a pang.

Meanwhile Alida kept an active ear toward a trio just behind her back.

"Ohoo, really!" hooted Mr. Howlet; "and what do you think of Uncle Wenny, dear old chap?"

"In the first place," answered Bessie, "I don't think 'dear old Wenny' old at all."

"Really! Prime of life, and that sort of thing, of course."

"I should not call him young," put in Serena.

"Now would you?" rejoined Howlet, gratefully.

"No, I should say, decidedly middle aged."

"Really!"

"And a confirmed old bachelor. Not a man likely to marry."

Mr. Howlet found the very thought amusing.

"No, not the marrying sort at all," he said. "Old Wen goes in for tigers and missionaries He's just back from Bombay or some such place where they've a famine or something of the sort. He's been distributing relief funds, don't you know. And now he's over here to buy up all the cows and advance the price of beef. I fancy some of our family must have been highwaymen. Those border boys, you know, who used—"

"To take from the rich and give to the poor," interpreted Bessie, for Mr. Howlet sometimes interpreted himself at length.

"I should think you would feel anxious when your uncle goes to such unhealthy places," said Miss Schepmoes, with a smile. Serena had discovered that with a smile one might say almost anything to Mr. Howlet.

"Really! Yes, poor old chap!"

"How does he like your calling him old?"

"Oh, Wenny does not care, he's such a good sort, don't you know."

"I suppose," went on Serena, "that when he is at home he lives at the family seat in Yorkshire."

"But Wensdale is in Devon, don't you know," corrected Mr. Howlet. "Oh, yes, he is there when he is not up in town or somewhere else. He's awfully fond of having people down, and lets them own the place, and walk all over him."

"For the shooting," said Miss Schepmoes, knowingly.

"No, really! He's a lot of odd ideas about killing things for sport that he's picked up from those duffers out in India."

"Is Wensdale a show place?" inquired Serena, bent on exhaustive information.

"Oh, well, you might say so in a way," replied Mr. Howlet, who was not without his share of family pride, "but it's off the line, you know, for trippers and Americans. Oh, I beg your pardon, I mean to say it's rather off the line, you know."

"And filled with heirlooms," suggested Serena, still unsatisfied, and Alida noticed that Bessie had said very little. But this was not the class of conversation in which Bessie shone.

Yes, Wensdale was filled with heirlooms, and moreover had a private ruin and a ghost which lost nothing in importance through the seeming reluctance of their expounder. And still Miss Schepmoes pressed to greater heights, and still Miss Brisbane followed silently.

"The fellowship of souls," observed Mr.

Leigh-Watkins, pensively, "is all we know of heaven."

"I beg to challenge that remark," said B. J., coming up, "I hold that heaven is all we know of the fellowship of souls."

The young clergyman's brown eyes said plainly, "I did not speak to you, sir," but his lips said to his host: "I don't quite catch your point."

"And I," announced B. J., "am prepared to leave the question to Miss Van Wandeleer without argument."

"I say," replied Alida, rising, "that the fellowship of heaven is all we know of souls," which being the final twist the sentence was capable of sustaining, passed for a decision.

Presently, in the general shifting of positions Alida found herself near Lord Wensdale.

"You shall not pass without speaking to me, Miss Van Wandeleer," he said, with his most open smile. "I'm told you are a Knickerbocker, and I have always wanted to know a real, live Knickerbocker."

"I am so glad you want to know me," she replied, "because I have always wanted to know a real, live earl."

"I see," returned the Englishman, laughing, for he scented humor, "and would it not be odd if each were to find the other very much like

every other body—I mean to say—every other good-looking body—'' and drawing himself erect he twisted his mustache with exaggerated complacency.

''But your nephew is good-looking,'' said Alida, ''and I do not think you at all alike.''

The retort, not a brilliant one, might even have been declared elementary in humor, but Alida made it with a purpose which it fulfilled. Lord Wensdale's eyes had been directed toward the group which still delved in Devonshire traditions, and no eyes directed thitherward could fail to note Miss Brisbane.

Bessie, a little apart from the others, sat with her head thrown back, her well-nigh perfect profile outlined against a rosy cushion, and her Irish eyes fixed dreamily on nothing in particular, Bessie's thoughts were probably at that moment fixed likewise on nothing in particular, but she appeared to think unutterable things.

''Oh, is not Bessie beautiful?'' Alida said, beneath her breath.

''I see!'' assented Lord Wensdale, thoughtfully, and presently Alida spoke of sleighing. Even if Bessie had not been serious she had done no harm.

Then Mr. Brisbane stirred up Herbert Howlet by asking if the English were fond of polo, and made ridiculous assertions, in which he called

upon his wife to bear him out. He miscalled Bellevue Avenue to Serena, and made the vicar swear that he was right, and he always so put disputed cases to Alida that she was forced to decide in his favor, which renewed the argument.

"Hello, where is Bess?" he asked, looking about for fresh victims.

"I think she took Lord Wensdale to see the greenhouse," Mrs. Brisbane answered.

"Palm-garden, mama," he corrected her; "they have probably gone to feed the alligators. Let us all go and help them."

Miss Brisbane was standing by a fountain in which were two small alligators—Pyramus and Thisbe by name—who did not look as though they had been recently fed. Before her stood Lord Wensdale, smiling.

"I may be wrong," she was saying, defiantly, "but I shall not admit it—ever."

"I sha'n't expect you to," he answered; "it's not an Anglo-Saxon habit."

"It is not fair to have so many facts," said Bessie. "Next time we fight it must be over something I know all about."

"And it shall be a battle to the death," replied Lord Wensdale. "Remember, I have taken up your glove."

"Really!" his nephew whispered to Alida, "whatever is old Wenny up to now?"

Somewhere in the rear of the party, paired with his hostess, the vicar was heard to say, "My thought would be terra-cotta."

When twenty minutes later Alida and Miss Schepmoes left the Park Avenue house together, the winter day had given place to a white night of snowy streets and carbon lamps. As they turned southward, walking rapidly, for the wind came chilly from the frozen river, they could see the straggling procession moving toward the Thirty-fourth Street ferry, rapid, silent cars all crowded to the platform. Further across the vista of Fourth Avenue, moved other processions, other cars, till the lights became a blur at Union Square, and that was only a new beginning. Nearer, broughams and hansoms swarmed about a striped awning, where footmen stood arow, and women, missing an object lesson in endurance, waited for carriages and stamped their feet.

"Fancy any one giving a tea on New Year's Day!" exclaimed Serena. "If one is not out of town one is supposed to be, and so is every one who knows."

"Has not that idea rather been given up?" inquired Alida, moderately.

"Oh, not at all." Serena was always well informed in spite of limited opportunities for

information. "They must be people like the Brisbanes who know no better."

"Or can afford to please themselves," Alida added, somewhat stiffly.

Serena laughed with unaffected merriment.

"Oh, aren't the Brisbanes delicious?" she cried. "Just think of having an earl to tea and inviting in your typewriter to meet him!" If Miss Schepmoes was critical, she was at least consistent.

"I never think of myself as anything but myself," remarked Alida.

"No more do I," returned Serena; "but they do not care for that; they do not care two straws who any one is. I suppose when Miss Elizabeth Barrett Brisbane, daughter of Ben Jonson Brisbane—fancy going to the anthology for names—becomes mistress of Wensdale castle in Devonshire she will have the beadle and the parish clerk to dinner."

"I trust that I shall be there when she does," replied Alida.

"I am afraid I did rub it in about his age," went on Miss Schepmoes, "but I really could not help it, she was so darned Vere de Vere."

"But Bessie is never in the least affected," protested Bessie's friend; "she is, if anything, too direct and simple."

Serena laughed derisively.

"Yes, that's her rôle," she sniffed. "When she said, 'Lord Wensdale, would you not like to see my alligators?' one might imagine the beasts to be in a wash-tub in the back yard instead of a million-dollar palm-garden. It took an Englishman to swallow those alligators at a gulp."

"You know nothing of Bessie's character," said Alida, "and the idea of her being interested in a man she never saw before is absurd." Then, to divert the conversation, she added, "Mr. Howlet is amusing, is he not?"

"I hate all Englishmen," proclaimed Serena. "You were so wise in keeping clear of titles. Bradish Osterhout is worth a hundred of them."

"There is no reason to mention him at all," said Miss Van Wandeleer.

"Of course not," the other agreed, willingly, "I know that nothing is announced."

They were going down the Madison Avenue hill now at a rapid pace—Serena's wistful glances toward the more brilliant street a block to westward had been of no avail—and over the arcade of the Garden of Diana just ahead a galaxy of red electric lamps spelled the inscription, Bernhardt.

"Those are my jewels," remarked Serena, looking up. "But Schepmoes would never do, would it? The very sound suggests 'Continuous.' What would you think of Sandys—Serena Sandys—with a 'y' of course?"

But Alida, if she had an opinion, did not give it.

"You remind me of Edward Volkert," she said, laughing.

"Do you mean old Mrs. Epps's grandson? Mrs. Van der Werff says he is as crazy as a June bug; but then she says that every one is crazy."

"He considers himself a born actor," replied Alida, non-committally, "and I am not at all sure he is not right."

"I should like very much to know him."

"That would not be a difficult matter to arrange."

Serena became thoughtful until they had passed the arches and were crossing the Square.

"Would it not be a good idea," she asked, "if I should walk with you to Mrs. Ruggles, and you should hint to Edward Volkert to take me home. The streets in Mackerelville are so unsafe after dark."

"I should not mind asking him directly," returned Alida, doubtfully; but the thought had already occurred to her that an acquaintance with Serena might be better for Volkert than that of any of King Solomon's wives.

Near the center of Madison Square she stopped and turned to look back.

There were the garden lights through the black trees; the hansom cabs in silhouette; the

level plains of snow. Here was the very bench, perhaps, from which a starving man, who was to win a medal and a château on the Loire, had started up to meet St. Martin with his cloak.

"For heaven's sake don't stop!" Serena cried, catching her companion's arm; "A tall man in a long, gray overcoat has been behind us all the way. He is a gentleman and awfully handsome, but for heaven's sake don't stop."

CHAPTER XIII

K. O. K.

The New Year started at a rattling pace. From Wall Street to Longacre, and from Longacre to the Speedway, everybody was agreed that never had such a steed lent mettle to the pneumatic tires of time. Now, for a record, everybody said, to start the brand-new century!

Rumor had it that B. J. Brisbane would arrange to consolidate all railways and pay all shareholders ten per cent, and extra dividends, perhaps. Rumor had it that a process had been discovered for developing power from salt water, which would, of course, be an economy. Rumor had it that a man had learned to fly by the simple expedient of lifting himself by the ears.

In Kenilworth Place affairs took on the glamor of their times. Doctor Van Gaasbeck increased his prices until the income that he did not make was doubled. Volkert exchanged his flute for a concertina to great advantage. Miss Toll fell heir to seven hundred dollars from an aunt. Bell sent a story to a ten-cent monthly, and Mrs. Ruggles had the lower bathroom papered.

As for Miss Van Wandeleer, she had never been

more popular, nor her company in greater demand. Society, which had always treated her well, seemed for the hour to find her indispensable; her gowns were copied; her sayings repeated; her beauty, family, grace, and general excellence extolled.

"After all," sighed Miss Deusenbury one day at luncheon, when neither Alida nor either of her relatives happened to be present, "after all, the old names count for something still."

"And so does the prospective ownership of K. O. K.," said Mrs. Van Gaasbeck, buttering toast.

"But do you think Alida will accept young Osterhout?" Miss Deusenbury inquired, anxiously.

"She is much too ill-behaved, I fear, to ever get the chance," said Mrs. Van Gaasbeck, biting.

But Mrs. Van Gaasbeck was not then aware of a scene that had taken place behind the red mahogany doors before the century was two weeks old.

It happened on a lowering afternoon at four o'clock, too early for the gas and too late to see well without it. But the parlor fire was for once hospitable, and as Alida stood with one foot upon the fender, and her forehead resting on her hand against the high, black marble mantelpiece, the shabby room looked comfortable and inviting,

and Chancellor De Vos beamed ruddy, though the Lady with a Rose—attributed to Sully—was in shadow.

Presently Alida, hearing a step, raised her head, and said, almost inaudibly: "I am very glad to see you," to Bradish Osterhout.

"I need not tell you why I asked leave to come this afternoon," he began at once, almost throwing his shining hat upon the red rep sofa, and hastily unbuttoning his right glove. He spoke with eagerness, and, like her, below his breath. But his voice, a trifle harsh by nature, did not lend itself well to the modulation, and the impetuous movements were made mechanical by certain rigid lines in his attire. That he was a lover no one could have doubted—Alida least of all—but he was a Frohman lover, freshly creased. When he said that he need not tell why he was there, he stood a moment in the firelight, waiting for her to speak.

"I am afraid it is to say that the gardener can spare me no more orchids," she suggested, in a tone which made the words of small importance, "and he is right, I don't deserve them."

Whatever Mr. Osterhout understood from this speech was not betrayed by any change in his regular, well-bred features, nor motion of his small, neat head.

"You wrote me I might come," he said.

"Yes," she replied, taking the burden on herself, "I wanted to see you very much, I wanted to speak to you about the flowers."

"To tell me that they bored you?"

"No, not that; not that at all. Only to thank you for them and to say that you must not send me any more."

He tugged at his glove nervously, and she allowed the hand against the chimney-piece to drop beside her. Then he came nearer, so near that as they faced each other across the fire there was but the fender's length between them. He wore the pin which was the pennon of his yacht. Alida had worn the pin herself on the day when the "Serpent" won the cup, the day Johnny Alexander made a stupid joke—and the serpent tempted her.

"You are letting me down easily," he said, with an unmirthful smile; "you are being considerate of my feelings. Don't you know me well enough to leave that out?"

"I did not think that you would mind about the flowers," she answered, disingenuously, but not with any purpose of deception. Whatever poor words might come stumbling after, the thoughts of both had gone on to the end, as light goes on, as the unfettered soul goes on in dreams.

"I don't mind anything but tact," he said,

coming back to dramatize the played-out comedy; "and I don't admit defeat until the winner crosses the line. Then, I think I know how to take my beating with the rest. Why did you say that you were glad to see me?"

"Because I am," she said, regarding him unflinchingly; "because I want to be so always. And I want you to be glad to see me whenever we meet, remembering only the good times we have had, and the talks. Oh, why not just remember them and go on being friends?"

"Why not remember them and go on being something more than friends?" he urged. Then, lowering his voice until it broke unmusically, though being from the heart it had a music of its own, he added: "Do you remember last June—that night upon the yacht?"

Alida turned her head to hide her face in shadow.

"Do you remember what you almost said when we were interrupted?"

"Yes, yes," she answered, hurriedly; "that interruption saved us both."

"Saved us, Alida?"

She faced him suddenly as the impulse seized her, looking full into his eyes.

"Yes, saved us," she repeated. "Would you like to hate me? Would you like to be thankful all your life that the cook fell overboard?"

"No," he said, regarding her in wonder, "I should not."

"But you must," she answered, resolutely; "it is only fair. I did not like you much then. Not half as much as I do now, but I was going to let you think I did. Do you understand? For the sake of—of everything."

"And can't you make me think so now—for the sake of everything—I shall not quibble over reasons."

"No, no, never that again! Please believe that it was only for a moment. I think so differently about such things now."

"About a little bit of money, I suppose," he answered, bluntly. "Well, let us eliminate that. If it cannot make me any better than I am, by Jove, it cannot make me any worse."

"No," said Alida, earnestly; "but it could make me worse, and it would go on making me worse and worse."

When she broke off he stood waiting for her to explain herself, watching her curiously, while a lump of soft coal in the fire fell to pieces, blazed up, and sent their shadows capering on the opposite wall.

"Mr. Osterhout," she said again, speaking slowly, with her eyes upon the flame, "I don't want you to have any illusions about me. Last summer when you were planning every moment

something new to give me pleasure, I was planning, too; I was picking out the carriages I meant to have, and the people I was going to patronize, and the people I was going to cut. That is a nice confession, is it not? Only the horror of the old woman, the nasty, purse-proud old woman that I saw myself growing into year by year, saved us. You may not believe me, but I was too good a friend to inflict her upon you."

"Alida!" he protested, taking hope from the unheard of argument, but she went on unheeding:

"If it could have been for a year, or five years, it would have been different—that would be such a little part of life. But it must have gone on and on till we were old, and afterward perhaps forever and ever and ever."

"The prospect does not frighten me in the least," said Mr. Osterhout, laughing for the first time.

"But it frightened me," returned Alida, "and it frightened me that I could even think of it. People who like each other very much don't care. That is the one sure way of telling."

If the quality of canvas had been in question, the test of gun barrels, Bradish Osterhout would have had an opinion and maintained it well. As it was, he answered, prudently: "Alida, let us

leave things as they are a little longer. You like me better than you did last summer, and who is to say you may not go on?"

"Oh, no; let us not do that!" she cried. "Let us understand each other now. It is not you, indeed, it is not. It is life, long, long life that must be as we make it. I do not know what I want mine to be, but I do know what I shall not let it be."

"You mean the only life I have to offer you?" he asked.

"Yes," said Alida, very softly, "that is what I mean."

They stood a little while before the fire after this. A very little while for two who had come near to looking into many fires side by side. And then he moved away and carelessly caught up his shining hat, for he could take his beatings with the rest.

"I have been thinking of joining the Bradishes at Nice," he said; "they are there, you know, with the Eurydice."

"You will have a lovely time, I'm sure," she answered; saying again, "you'll have a lovely time."

"Good by," he said, holding out his hand.

"Good by," she said; "God bless you."

One other moment by the fire—the last. And something else—the first and last. But he

deserved better payment and she did not grudge him this.

He seemed not to leave the dusky room, only to fade into shadow out of her life, he and his yacht and his automobile and his orchid house and everything that was his, even his countless spindles, weaving K. O. K. on every piece.

Miss Van Wandeleer did not enjoy the opera that evening, and she found the conversation of Johnny Alexander, who monopolized her, particulary insipid, and on the following morning she cut her Italian lesson altogether. It was not until twenty-four whole hours had elapsed that an epistle from Bessie Brisbane restored her spirits in a measure.

It had been Miss Brisbane's fancy to use her father's Remington, and the pursuit of proficiency had tempted unwonted literary effort. It ran:

DEAR ALIDA:

Just think how we have missed each other since New Year's Day. I thought this morning that you might venture out to return one of the several calls you owe me, but now the rain is coming down for keeps, and I have given up all hope of you or any one else.

Mama and I escaped yesterday and lunched at a restaurant—she loves to get away from home and eat whatever she pleases—and in consequence she has oppression to-day, and I a cold.

Papa's dinner is developing into a barbecue, and as he

will not adopt my suggestion of sending them in in squads, I have to fight for my few poor little seats in the middle of the table. Last evening when one of my guests sent word that he had suddenly been called abroad (to Europe or some such place, as 'Erbert would say), B. J. actually appropriated the vacant chair to a protégé of his own, a prairie product of unknown quantity who is to fall to me. I hope you won't mind the diplomat, no one else has him in such complete control. For our other men, we shall have Leigh-Watkins and a Mr. Jacob, who, at the age of twenty-seven, has done something quite remarkable in Amalgamated Cheese. . . . . You see your dinner before you! The rest of the table will cut very little ice for us.

This morning I have been helping Serena to make card catalogues. When we feared she might not have enough to do, we did not know our Schepmoes. She is making card catalogues for everything in the house, from the books to B. J.'s shoes, and to-day she and I together devised a new one to be called "A Catalogue of Acquaintances for the Newly Rich." The cards are to be something like this:

Name and address.
Place and date of introduction.
Incidents of interest.
Husband, if married.
Children, if any.
Incidents of interest.
Favorite topic of conversation.
Fad, religion, or dressmaker.
Incidents of interest.

We hope to improve on this, and shall be grateful for suggestions, but B. J. is most discouraging. He pretends to have once presented a Guest Book to a maiden aunt

who honored him with the first entry, and wrote under "Remarks"—big appetite—grumpy.

Uncle Wenny—dear old chap—is in Colorado with an unwilling nephew as a sort of caddy. He is sending us a caribou head. What? and why? Leigh-Watkins dropped in yesterday. He considers you sympathetic and high-minded. Incident of interest—a Martini. But mama made him take it to keep out the cold. . . . . Dear me! and I meant to be so tactful.

Do come as early as you can on Thursday. The brougham will be there by seven, with a maid (MacGuffin).

Faithfully yours,

ELIZABETH BARRETT BRISBANE.

CHAPTER XIV

A LITTLE LADLE

Upon the day of the Brisbane dinner a pleasurable flutter filled the breasts of the good ladies in Kenilworth Place. To be sure but one of their number had been bidden, but this was in a way a recognition of them all. The New People—the impossible New People—were beginning to understand.

For this was to be no ordinary dinner, as the readers of the morning newspapers were aware. The *Bonfire* had indeed devised a cartoon commemorative of the occasion, an octopus beneath a table, uplifting many tentacles, each terminating in a head of one of Mr. Brisbane's supposed guests: the Beef Trust, the Cracker Trust, the Candlestick Trust. The Billion Dollar Banquet, it was called, and the fare appeared to consist largely of banks and locomotives. Clearly events must be impending when a gentleman of B. J.'s known propensities invites an octopus to dine.

At luncheon, though the company tried to keep away from it, the topic of the Brisbanes kept recurring. Once Mrs. Van Gaasbeck, apparently forgetful of the coffee-spoon incident,

said: "I saw a photograph of their new sleigh in a Sunday paper. It was really a most surprising equipage."

"Was it a Russian sleigh with streamers?" asked Alida.

"Yes; you have driven in it, I suppose?"

"Only once for a little way in the park. It was very comfortable."

"Was it, indeed, my dear? But don't you think the real old-fashioned ones more so? I have in mind a yellow one I noticed not long since."

Late in the afternoon Bessie sent Mr. Love, with violets for Alida, and a bulletin from the center of disturbance.

Miss Schepmoes, it appeared, had taken the bit in her teeth. She had rearranged the sittings—all except six in the middle; she had upset the musical programme, and she had countermanded half of the wines. She had, moreover, declared an intention to herself reign regent in the ante-room of service.

"We are prepared to see Serena in a dress suit, personally conducting the canvas-backs," Bessie wrote.

Alida's gown was to be of blue and silver, and it was to be everything that Bazet could make it. For Bazet had taken in another floor and was paying off mortgages in the Borough of the

Bronx. "Mademoiselle," she had said, in her guileless, Gaelic way, "it would be ruin if you did not have the most beautiful dress at the dinner. Name of Deity, think of my children!"

And so, some hours later, Miss Van Wandeleer, mindful of the young Bazets, rolled up the brilliant avenue without a cloud as big as a cab fare to dim the prospect of the evening's pleasure. But one small fly lurked in the ointment of her satisfaction, and the name of that fly was Van Gaasbeck.

"There'll be a hot time in the old town tonight," said Bessie, nodding her approval in the dressing-room, while the kneeling MacGuffin removed Alida's fur-lined boots. "You make me feel like a Canadian quarter in a bull market, as papa says."

Alida, thrusting out a small, blue foot to receive its slipper, looked up, laughing.

"I was going to say something complimentary," she answered, "but I sh'n't attempt to compete with Mr. Brisbane."

"Oh, never mind," cried Bessie, "I am sufficiently conceited; Schepmoes said just now that I had an air! An air; and only Jacob and the diplomat, and Leigh-Watkins to breathe it.

"But you forget the cowboy," said Alida, her spirits rising as the buzzing of the fly Van Gaasbeck grew remote. The room was a boudoir of

Badrilbadour; somewhere down the marble stairs musicians were tuning violins in a grove of palms; Bessie's blue eyes were bright with their most expansive "I'll-divide-my-pile-with-you" expression, and Alida noted that, although her pink gown was worth a squire's ransom, she did not wear a single jewel.

"It seems that he is not a cowboy after all," explained Miss Brisbane, seating herself upon the arm of a chair; "but a sort of Rocky Mountain Moses, who used to read Macaulay to miners in an opera house to cultivate their ideals; and he made them all play Brutus and Cassius instead of keno, and they gave up lynching and took to Dickens parties. I'm not quite sure about the details, and it don't sound very exciting, but B. J. says it shows what can be done. I am afraid Jacob will have to be my main reliance; they say he is musical when not mercenary."

"And I am to have the clergyman and the diplomat?"

"Yes; church and state. Remark that early, Leigh-Watkins is sure to think of it. The rest are just assorted multimillionaires. I should not be surprised if the Anarchists were to take advantage of the occasion. If you feel anything moving under the table, don't scream, it will be only a Pinkerton man in search of dynamite."

"How very exciting! We sha'n't be dull a moment."

"I'm not so sure of that. There won't be any fun but what we make ourselves. I wonder if Serena told them to begin with that wedding march!"

"Perhaps it is an omen," suggested Alida.

"Then you can have it," returned Bessie, generously.

The talk was interrupted by the entrance of a large lady draped in fur from head to foot. But presently, under the ministrations of MacGuffin, she became a vision of St. Anthony, whose dreams were realistic for a monk. As she emerged from her outer covering one wondered if there had not been some mistake, but she had her limits.

"I am Mrs. Harris Fosdick, the fat Mrs. Fosdick," she broke forth—even her mode of speech was cut a trifle low—"and this is Bessie, I am sure." But as it happened she had hit upon Alida for her greeting, and the error being explained, she said, with kindly patronage, "Well, whoever you are, you're pretty enough to be anybody."

Miss Brisbane made a face behind the ample alabaster shoulders. "This is Miss Van Wandeleer," she drawled.

"Not *the* Miss Van Wandeleer, not Alida! I

might have known it! And you are Bessie. Bless my soul, you are a pair. I pity the young men between you. Have a good time, my dears, before you get too fat."

Both girls looked modestly unconscious, and other guests arriving, they slipped out unobserved and down the stairs to where the host and hostess stood before the drawing-room fire.

"The Night Before the Execution, group six in catalogue," murmured their daughter, feelingly, and B. J., springing forward, cried: "Ah, the Princess Alida. Permit me the honor—" which honor consisted in drawing Alida's hand through his arm and leading her to Mrs. Brisbane, who had lost a glove-button and didn't care. There was a faint odor of lemon peel in the air.

"Here is Miss Alida, mama," said B. J., "and she insists on going in with the cleverest and handsomest man in the room."

"But, Ben, you have to take in Mrs. Fosdick," said his wife, and thereupon there was mirth at her expense.

"Indeed you think yourself very smart," resumed the lady, pertly; "I should not have said that if there had been another man in the room."

"If any one monkeys with mama to-night, I see his finish," remarked Miss Brisbane, in hyperboles.

"It's awfully good of you to help us with our business men," said Mrs. Brisbane to Alida; "but I'm afraid you may find them hard to talk to."

"I'm rather good at listening," said Alida, and Bessie put in, warningly: "Don't do that. I listened once to Mr. Fosdick after one of father's dinners. I didn't understand a word, but fancied we were getting on splendidly, until he ended with 'very truly yours, Harris Fosdick.' He thought he had been dictating to his typewriter!"

Then other guests came in quick succession, filling the drawing-room with the noise of many voices pitched too high. The men were much alike, and differed only in the matters of weight and whiskers; keen-eyed men, whose thoughts were a day ahead of time, and to whom the hours of social life were but blank spaces on a mighty ticker tape. The diplomat, among them, looked small and foreign, and the Reverend Leigh-Watkins, unsophisticated. The women were resplendent, but they did not interest Alida, who being twenty, thought it of small importance what forty might have on. As she looked over the assembly she saw that Bessie had not exaggerated its possibilities of dullness.

"Let me stand here by you and watch the boys turn green with jealousy," whispered B. J., gal-

lantly. Alida had never seen him so effusive in his greetings or known him laugh so readily. His eyes were snapping, and when he listened to what was said to him, he moistened his lips continually. She wondered if he could be nervous at giving so large a dinner, but dismissed the thought as improbable. Then something rather odd occurred.

Mr. Jacob, very slick and smooth—Alida recalled a previous meeting with Mr. Jacob—appeared before B. J. from nowhere in particular, and said, without further greeting, the mystic words: "All right."

"Good," said B. J., "the whole crowd in?"

"The whole caboodle," answered Mr. Jacob, smiling mystically, "and we got the last at fifty-seven."

"Good again," said Mr. Brisbane in the words of Pumblechook, "hold on to every share."

Alida, feeling herself superfluous, made an attempt to move away, which, though unsuccessful in the throng, recalled her presence.

"Hold on to every share," repeated Mr. Jacob.

"No, sell five hundred to Van Wandeleer," corrected Brisbane. Alida, hearing her own name, stood still.

"What initial?" inquired the other, taking a small pad of paper from his breast pocket.

"A.," said Mr. Brisbane; "A. Van Wandeleer."

"Sell at to-morrow's opening?"

"No, sell at fifty-seven."

"But it's sure to open ten points up, and it's good for one hundred and ten!"

"I don't care; I have more than I want."

"But five hundred is nothing at all," protested Mr. Jacob, incredulously, and B. J., laughing, said: "Dear me, I'm forgetting manners. Miss Van Wandeleer, let me introduce my young friend, Mr. Jacob. He and I sometimes get up practical jokes. Will you kindly put your initials on this paper? Just O. K. and A. V. W."

Alida, somewhat bewildered, took the paper and wrote as she had been instructed. If there was a joke on foot she was more than willing to assist.

"And now," said B. J., laughing, "if it should happen to rain mush, the Princess will have a little spoon, will she not, Jacob?"

"A little ladle, we hope," replied the smooth young man, politely.

"Ben, Bessie is looking for you everywhere," said Mrs. Brisbane, who forgetting that she was not a guest, passed on the arm of the Candle Stick Trust.

"Yes, it was in the gallery of the Stock Exchange," Mr. Jacob was reminding Alida, "and Brisbane called me out."

"Yes," she assented, "and I was never more excited in my life. It was like a bear garden."

"Please say a bull fight," pleaded the broker, laughing; "but I have seen you at the opera many times since then." This brought a milder aspect of his nature to the fore, and Wagner lasted till the diplomat presented his credentials.

To Alida he was a colorless little alien, who had fallen to her lot before at dinners and would probably so fall again. As he stood now before her, with his upright hair of Teutonic brown, his wide, Muscovite mouth, and Parisian mustaches, it would be difficult to name at once the friendly nation of his origin; for as he spoke all tongues—including English—with a continental accent, he might have represented any one of several. Popular belief held him to prefer New York climatically to Washington, though stories from the capital city gave other reasons for his absence.

"And now we must speak French the entire evening," said Alida, as they moved away from Mr. Jacob, "and you may correct my American accent."

"But I cannot think of Miss Van Wandeleer as an American," he answered, with a courteous bow, for this was his most diplomatic compliment.

"It is so nice in you to say that. Those are the little things we recall when international differences arise," she answered, sweetly; and this was as far as she ever ventured in politics.

"And who are all these people?" he asked, with an inclusive sweep of the assembly. "I have never seen one of them before. Such women! Ugh! You are a white fawn among anecdotes!"

"Anecdotes?" she repeated.

"Yes, are they not? B-a-a-a!" returned the diplomat.

"Oh, yes, nanny-goats! I understand. And don't you know them? Well, that one over there is our hostess, and the kid beside her is her daughter, and beyond them in black velvet is the nanny-goat at whose stable you and I dined last week."

"Ah, that was an evening I have not forgotten," he whispered, losing interest in the company. "And I scarcely hoped to find you here to-night."

Alida was never certain whether the last words were spoken by the diplomat or by another or by both at the same time. She only knew that for a moment the things and people near her faded and grew indistinct as through falling snow; that the music of the violins became suddenly clamorous, like the music of bells—like the bells of

Trinity. Storm, midnight, and the City of Silences passed before her, and then an old man in a yellow sleigh. It seemed that she herself had just been speaking, saying foolishly to some one who held her hand in a great fur glove that the Snow Queen did not want to melt. Perhaps the fact of her hand being held somewhat tightly in reality contributed to the illusion.

"At last!" said Anthony Bogardus, or that was what she thought he said, for the procession was forming all about them with confusion of tongues, and Alida, who did not like to shout, looked up and nodded her head.

"But you told me you knew no one in the city," cried Bessie, who was close behind Bogardus and appeared to exercise proprietorship.

Then Mrs. Fosdick—the fat Mrs. Fosdick—backed in between them, to avoid some one who was backing into her. Finding herself within confidential distance of another, the excellent woman raised her fan to whisper, and as that other chanced to be Miss Van Wandeleer, she said: "I notice that the Brisbane girl selected the best-looking man for herself. Pitch in, my dear, and cut her out!" It was by such timely hints that she kept society from stagnation, and kept herself amused. But to Alida, humbly waiting her turn among the less important, the words suggested only a depressing dread lest she and

Bessie should ever, for any cause, become less good friends.

One skilled in the analysis of emotions might have found cause for uneasiness in this sudden fall from reason, but Alida, marching in to dinner, speculated only whether the backs of people's necks ever really betrayed their feelings.

"This is the first New York house I have ever been in," she heard some one say behind, and she wondered, resentfully, if Bella Ruggles's establishment in his eyes was not even a house. With a sudden inspiration she turned to the diplomat, speaking volubly in French, and he, growing gay and gallant, whispered something that she did not hear. Nevertheless when Bessie mentioned snow she laughed aloud, so as not to learn that somebody had never been in a New York sleigh.

CHAPTER XV

FEEDING *THE* OCTOPUS

The Billion Dollar Banquet, from Miss Van Wandeleer's point of view, consisted of herself, a gentleman on either side, and her three opposite neighbors. By certain movements of the head she could find a vista between candles and flowers, at the end of which a featureless B. J. discoursed in pantomime, and in the other direction Mrs. Brisbane was in like manner discoverable. Sometimes, borne upon a favoring breeze, she heard the laugh of Mrs. Harris Fosdick. But these might have been phenomena of a mere Million Dollar Banquet, and if the Octopus performed any interesting antics she missed them altogether.

During the earlier courses she occupied herself pleasantly in causing the Reverend Mr. Leigh-Watkins to forget the existence of another neighbor, and in maintaining the diplomat's attentions just below the danger point for hands beneath the table-cloth.

It was in the sixty seconds following fish—Serena's entrée acts were nicely timed—that Alida received her first reminder from Miss Brisbane,

in the shape of a Black Hamburg bowled with accurate aim toward her dinner roll.

"Are your ears burning?" inquired Bessie, leaning forward.

"No, not at all," replied Alida, flushing a little.

"Well, they ought to be," returned the other, and Alida blushed again, this time not a little. She was sure that Bessie's partner had seen the blush, but though the circumstance was most annoying, the dinner after this took on another character.

"Who is that big fellow over there?" demanded the diplomat, with affected savageness, and receiving no response he turned toward the lady on his left, whom he presently discovered to be the possessor of a neck.

"Have you been reading anything interesting lately?" inquired Alida of the clergyman.

Mr. Leigh-Watkins received this evidence of high mindedness with satisfaction. For the lady he had taken in to dinner having lately made submission to the Roman yoke, he, doubtless unjustly, suspected a desire on her part to burn him at the stake. Serena's humor was at times a trifle crude. Imperfect knowledge concerning the nature of Johannisberger had caused the tones of eyebrows and mustache to become diffused, and the official waistcoat, worn in connection

with more worldly habit, seemed now an eccentricity rather than a badge. But as his outer aspect acquired Watkins his voice grew musical with Leigh.

"Trash," he replied; "I rarely read anything else. It is my antidote for thought," and pausing a moment to smile at his own fancy, he added, in a comfortable undertone of confidence, "Is it not a luxury sometimes not to think?"

"It is one I can't afford," she answered. "I always have to think, about clothes or meals or engagements."

"Those are not thoughts but instincts," said the thinker. "Surely this must be plain to you, you who have a soul."

"Oh, no, I have not," said Alida; "I am a soul and have a body."

"That's good!" exclaimed the other, warmly; "that's really very good. It rather fits in with a train of reasoning I have in mind. I fancy I can use it."

"I hope you can," she answered, generously; "It's not original."

"Scarcely, scarcely," rejoined the preacher, with a tolerant smile; "but do you recall who said it first?"

"No," said Alida, becoming thoughtful; "but don't you think it sounds a little bit like Adam?"

"Roederer, sir, please, sir?" inquired the

seductive voice of a footman between them, and Mr. Leigh-Watkins answered, "Yes, a little," adding as in extenuation, "I find nothing so refreshing as champagne."

Opposite, between Bessie and her companion, a kindred voice was murmuring, "Roederer, sir, please, sir?" and Alida's eyes chancing in that direction, encountered the familiar face of Edward Volkert, the corners of his mouth drawn down, his eyes expressing vacuity, and his nose slightly reddened. But Alida had never seen a face so absolutely impassive, and he breathed his formula from wooden lips.

"Roederer, mum, please, mum?"

As he deftly waved his bottle within an inch or less of Mr. Jacob's ear, he bestowed upon Alida an unseeing gaze, while his face assumed still deeper lines of hopeless bondage.

"Oh, Miss Van Wandeleer, I trust you are not ill!" exclaimed the clergyman, dipping the corner of his napkin in champagne.

"Slip out with me to the palm-garden, the air will do you good," whispered the urgent accents of diplomacy.

"Oh, it is nothing," the sufferer protested, "a bread crumb, that is all."

But after this she watched the flitting shapes of shadowy elementals beyond the aura of the table with nervous apprehension.

She saw him several times again, with his slightly reddened nose and ridiculous drawn lips, and upon each occasion feared another crumb. And presently, when the apparition faded altogether, it added nothing to her comfort to know that it was hovering behind her back.

"Your latest footman is quite perfect," she told Bessie when next they spoke, and Miss Brisbane, with a look of horror, exclaimed: "Great Scott, you don't mean Schepmoes!"

On being reassured, Miss Brisbane evidently gave her neighbors a picturesque version of the story of Serena, while Alida and the diplomat discussed a foreign literature of which she knew little and he less. In confidence he told her that the lady of the neck had invited him to call.

"But I shall not do so," he added, heartlessly.

"Were you not going to tell me something about a line of thought?" Alida asked the clergyman, when his turn for notice came again.

Mr. Leigh-Watkins, if he had been silent for a space, had not been idle, and there was a twinkle in his brown eyes not in accord with the apparently untasted state of his wine-glass.

"I was about to tell you," he replied, "of a pamphlet I am writing, entitled, 'The Errors of Creation.' Does not the idea appeal to you?"

"No," said Alida, frankly; "it strikes me as very wicked."

"You take too low a view of Providence, I fear," he said, with much solemnity; "to me there is no hope but in the mighty blunders of Omnipotence."

"How can you say such things?" Alida cried, indignantly.

Mr. Leigh-Watkins moistened his lips with Roederer and set down his glass, which it might have been noticed, became immediately full again, while at the same moment Alida fancied herself to hear, faintly and as by long distance telephone, the words, "Edward, be silent!" in the voice of Grandma Epps.

"Are not evolution and progression the laws of being?" demanded Mr. Leigh-Watkins in the language of his pamphlet. "Can Deity make laws and disregard them? Shall the marching universe in time overtake its creator? Shall it pass him ultimately, leaving him behind? Yet this must come to pass if he stands still; and to be incapable of error is to be incapable of advance."

"If that were true—and I don't believe it is—there would not be much left," returned Alida.

"There would still be faith," he answered.

"Faith in what?" she demanded.

"Faith in ourselves," said Mr. Leigh-Watkins, meeting her eyes, dreamily; "faith in the Divine light within us."

"I haven't any light in me," replied Alida, "not a glimmer."

Mr. Leigh-Watkins laughed a mocking laugh and sipped. "We, all of us, have that within us which we least suspect," he said, oracularly. "I may think myself strong, and yet, who knows? You think yourself a butterfly, light, careless, gay, and yet I can believe you capable of a supreme self-sacrifice. I can see you under the impulse of a strong emotion hesitating at nothing, nothing."

He smiled and watched the bubbles in his glass, as though they gave him further insight into Alida's desperate character, and they were very active bubbles.

"I can think of you as Joan of Arc," he went on, contemplatively, "as Constance De Beverly—"

"I wish you would not," said Alida, who if she must be thought of, preferred that it be in a golf skirt at the least. "I assure you I am not at all like either."

He leaned his head against the high back of his chair and looked upon her dreamily with half-closed eyes.

"Tell me what you are like," he murmured; "tell me of yourself, your hopes, and fears. Tell me what the world has been to you. Tell me what you see before you."

"I think it is terrapin," said Alida; "don't you love it?"

"*Love!*" he repeated, bitterly; "you speak profanely, Miss Van Wandeleer."

"You would not think so," was her answer, "if you had ever been in Baltimore."

Mr. Leigh-Watkins winced as if with pain.

"Don't," he pleaded, holding up a warning hand; "don't spoil a golden moment such as this. Though you may never know what love can be, though you may never feel its anguish and its fire—"

"I hope I shall not," said Alida; "it does not sound at all attractive."

She spoke gayly, and with the animation that made most people at a table wish their seats were nearer, but in her dread of what Watkins—Leigh had been bad enough—might say next, she would have welcomed a moderate earthquake, or a mutiny among the cooks. Instinctively she shot one swift, appealing glance across the table, not toward Bessie, who was talking to Mr. Jacob and wore an expression of such refined absorption that Alida guessed her subject to be music; not to the absurdly correct gentleman, who kept his head inclined attentively toward the thin lady at his side, and his eyes on people who were not thinking of him at all; but to some one who had come to her before when she was cold and lonely,

and had cared for her and taken her safely home. He would understand if he were anywhere within a thousand miles—and he did understand.

"Mr. Watkins," said Bogardus, leaning forward, after a nod to the thin lady which showed her to be included in the new discussion, "have you seen the article on thought transference in the current number of the *Psychic Research Journal?*"

"Some one is speaking to you," Alida told her neighbor, who thus admonished, answered shortly in the negative.

"Oh, you should not miss it," went on Bogardus; "it shows how we can become aware of the exact impression we are making on our hearers, a matter of great importance to the clergy, I should think."

"It is not the sort of thing I am interested in at all," replied the minister, attacking his terrapin, savagely, and there was a provoking little silver butterfly upon Alida's shoulder that seemed to shake with merriment.

This broke the way to general conversation, and as the Octopus had now grown sportive it was possible to talk across the table without exciting undue notice. Every one was talking across the table. Everywhere formality was relaxed. The grapes, when tired of posing, dropped down and rolled upon the cloth. The

candles cocked their shades to one side and did not care what happened.

"And how is Bell?" Bogardus found an opportunity to ask, and Alida, laughing, assured him of Miss Ruggles's health.

"And when is she to marry Van Gaasbeck?"

"How do you know they are to be married?"

"He told me so."

"Doctor Van Gaasbeck?"

"Yes, he mentioned it last time I called on him—for a tonic. He has given me four since New Year's Day."

Alida, who received this information, outwardly at least, unmoved by sentiments of pity, allowed several seconds to elapse before turning her attention to her plate, which like all the Brisbane plates, was well worth a close inspection. When she again looked up, Bessie was exhibiting a dinner card, whereon Mr. Jacob had sketched a public character in seven lines. Mr. Jacob always had a pencil.

This feat inspired the others to attempts at simple entertainment with the means at hand. Alida assayed a devil having a black Hamburg for a head, and would have met with less success but for a still, small voice behind her chair, which whispered, "Use salted almonds for the horns."

Bogardus, with inverted, colored glasses, showed how gamblers in the West deceived their

dupes, and the diplomat obligingly amputated his own thumb. Then Bessie, in default of other accomplishments, was given two minutes to improvise a toast, with this result:—

> "Here's to early friends, and late friends,
> And a new friend every minute!
> Here's to any old thing that fate sends
> So long as we are in it."

The effort was not one of Miss Brisbane's best, but the young people drank it laughing, and Leigh-Watkins, observing his glass to be full, made a mistake and drank it twice.

With the ices came a new diversion, emanating from the fertile brain of Miss Serena Schepmoes.

Upon each individual pyramid of spun sugar reposed an article of silver, which upon inspection, proved symbolically appropriate to its recipient. Banks for the bankers; oil barrels for the illuminati; steamships for those who go down into the sea by proxy, until it seemed as though the *Bonfire* cartoon had been prophetic, although the pleasure of the Octopus, in its toys, suggested rather a sudden transition from a billion dollar banquet to a children's tea party.

Alida's token was a Dutch windmill. Bogardus received a cow-bell of practical dimensions; Leigh-Watkins an alms basin almost large enough for St. Jude's the Obscure; the diplomat a projectile labeled Peace; Miss Brisbane a cat sug-

gesting amusingly impossible contingencies, and Mr. Jacob a cheese, presumably amalgamated.

"We don't deserve a particle of credit," Bessie protested, in reply to many compliments; "Serena Schepmoes thought of everything herself."

"Then I shall live in the hope of one day meeting Serena Schepmoes," declared Mr. Jacob, unmindful of the disapproving visage of a red-nosed footman.

Later, in the great square hall, whither the company had trooped in discreet disorder, Alida found herself near Mrs. Fosdick.

"Come over here, my dear, and sit by me," began that lady, affably; "I don't believe in bothering men when they are smoking. The old way of shutting them up together was much the best—poor Harris never hears a story worth repeating any more. Is not my cigarette case fetching? Thank heaven for cigarettes! And what is your favor? A mill? Good gracious! don't let your cap go over it, my dear!"

Alida's knowledge of slang, though large, did not extend beyond the native product. But though the point of Mrs. Fosdick's merry jest remained obscure, she thought the fat lady most objectionable.

"I should like to find Mrs. Brisbane," she remarked, casting a searching eye about her, but Mrs. Fosdick said, still amiably: "Oh, no, you

want to get away from me, and so you shall, my dear, when I am through with you. Tell me if Bradish Osterhout has really gone abroad."

"I have heard so," said Alida, stiffly.

"Why, then, it's true!" the other cried in exultation.

"Yes, I believe he sailed on Wednesday."

"I don't mean that, I mean the story."

"I did not know there was a story," said Alida, making a movement to escape, which Mrs. Fosdick intercepted.

"Oh, then you must let me tell it to you, it is too delicious," she insisted. "Of course I shall not mention names, but there was a girl—about your age, my dear—to whom he has been sending orchids all winter—in boxes—you know how they come. And only last week he sent her one, with the cutest little note. 'Wear these to-night for my sake,' but, my dear, there had been some mistake, for when she came to open the box, there lay a suit of K. O. K."

Alida turned and hurried through the nearest door, her only wish that every step should take her further from the fat Mrs. Fosdick.

CHAPTER XVI

GREEN MINT

In the rose room Alida discovered Mr. Leigh-Watkins, who did not smoke, seated in the center of a circle of ladies who disliked the smell of smoke, and from a sentence overheard, she divined the reverend gentleman to be making hay.

"My thought is terra-cotta," he was saying.

She did not join the conference, for, however charitably disposed toward trifling lapses on the part of one thrown so much with ugly girls, she detested terra-cotta.

Beyond the rose room lay the room of Flemish tapestries, where she had heard from Mr. Brisbane the story of his pictures; the mountain tunnel, and St. Martin of Madison Square. Here she came upon many of the guests, a clear majority of the men, and of honorable women not a few, scattered in standing groups, though inviting seats were in abundance, while the air grew sweet with coffee and the faint incense of good tobacco newly lighted.

In a distant corner two had found a resting place; the diplomat and she of the neck, who

had also in the interval developed arms. Aside from these and Mr. Brisbane, Alida, for the moment, saw no one of her acquaintance.

B. J. stood near the door by which she had come in, in company with two of his guests. One was a white gentleman; white of hair and pointed beard and shirt front and tie and studs and waistcoat; so colorless, indeed, was he that Alida, whose habit was to generalize, called him at once the Double Blank. The other being beady-eyed and broad of beak, she called the Swallow for convenience. It would not have pleased these pillars of society had they known of this, but it might have afforded them matter for reflection.

Brisbane was in the act of demonstrating some interesting fact upon the polished surface of a Flemish table, where lay the nucleus of Bessie's collection of bindings—which would probably remain a nucleus. And he had piled the books together as though they had been blocks of wood.

"There," he explained, sliding a vellum cover across the board, "that is San Francisco, and here (he slid another cover in the opposite direction), here is New York. That statuette—Mercury, I believe—can represent Chicago, which completes the triangle. Problem: to prove the two sides longer than the base."

"I do not question that the straight line is the

shorter," declared the Double Blank, and the Swallow said: "My point is that your apex happens to be Chicago. We can't ignore Chicago."

"If we can't," answered Mr. Brisbane, "we leave the way clear for the man who can."

"Brisbane," said the Double Blank, regarding Bessie's bindings, thoughtfully, "it may seem an odd question at this late day, but what is it that you expect to accomplish ultimately?"

"I expect to cross the continent in fifty hours. In fact, I mean to do so."

"Whew!" said the Swallow, "how are you going to do it, flying machine?"

"No," replied Brisbane, "by the ordinary market locomotive, if I can't do better. If there is nothing to frighten a man in sixty miles an hour for five hours, why should there be in keeping it up for fifty?"

"Good!" cried the Swallow; "go ahead, but give me time to sell out before your first train starts."

"And the present weak spot in the chain is—" began the Double Blank, but B. J. interrupted—

"The weak spot is, a link that's missing altogether," he admitted, frankly; "The Big B. crowd is holding out for Transcontinental at the market price, share for share, theirs at fifty-seven to ours at a hundred and ten, and we shall be lucky to pull through at that."

"Whew!" said the Swallow again, "suppose the market were to break?"

"The market must not break. That's your end."

"Mine?"

"Yes, yours and Fosdick's and the others. Some of us gather cherries and others hold the ladder—even-Steven."

"We must see what can be done," observed the Double Blank, and the others seemed to find this observation most amusing, while B. J. threw the binding down as though to end discussion.

Alida had been vacillating between St. Martin and the door, uncertain whether to regain the hall by advance or retreat.

"Come, Miss Van Wandeleer," exclaimed the host, catching sight of her, "come and save us from the shop; we are talking of our shoelaces like three old peddlers."

"Another daughter, I presume," remarked the Double Blank, who never listened to what did not interest him, and who disapproved of daughters as a class. But the Swallow, who was a man of greater tact, remarked that there could not be too many Brisbanes, and while the matter was being explained a servant brought a tray of little cups.

"I presume you are fond of golf and tennis and such things," said the Double Blank, severely,

and Alida meekly pleaded guilty. Then the Swallow asked if she resided in New York. To her reply that the Van Wandeleers had been metropolitan for the best part of three centuries, he flippantly rejoined: "Whew! that must have been before the ark!"

"No," said Alida, feeling reproof incumbent upon her, "only just before the Golden Calf."

"By the way, do you remember what I told you of the tunnel picture?" asked Mr. Brisbane, in a lower tone, which gave the others an opportunity to resume Big B. between themselves, but before Alida could reply, a trifling interruption occurred.

"Cigarettes, mum, please, mum?"

Mr. Brisbane, catching sight of a binding he had dropped, stooped to pick it up himself, while Alida took advantage of the moment to whisper, "Edward Volkert, if you do not stop this instantly, I will give you away."

"Most ladies likes the cork-tipped best," he said, respectfully. "They takes 'ome boxes to the children."

A moment later he pressed his wares upon B. J., whom he feigned not to recognize.

"Better take a 'andful, sir," he said, "most of the gentlemen does."

Other guests came up to exchange pleasantries with their host, and to admire his ornaments and

pictures, and presently Alida found herself the center of a court. But her customary court in numbers only, and she missed her jester, Johnny Alexander, and neither was she yet accustomed to not expecting Bradish Osterhout.

Miss Van Wandeleer was tired of standing, and more than tired of the generation which knew not Joseph, and the face of one whose mother had attended Fulham Priory, when it appeared, was a satisfaction in itself.

"I believe that somebody is about to sing," said Anthony Bogardus, "either Tannhäuser or Tristan, who has been liberated on parole and must go back to Broadway and die in fifteen minutes."

"Oh!" cried the others, in a chorus, "How delightful!"

"Shall we go?" asked Alida, when they were alone, as her companion showed no disposition to conduct her to the music-room.

"If you wish it," he replied; "but I hoped you might agree with me that Wagner without an orchestra is too much like pretzels without beer."

"But I am very fond of Wagner," she protested.

"And I of pretzels," he rejoined, and added, simply, "Please don't go, I have been walking for a full half hour. There never was a house, I'm sure, that contained so many rooms."

"I should like to sit down for a moment," she admitted. "Have you been looking at the rooms?"

"No, only looking in them, and I should have been still looking had it not been for the butler, or footman, or whatever his exalted state may be, whom you sent to find your fan. He very kindly asked me if I had it, which brought about confidential relations."

"How stupid of him," she commented. "Did you notice that his nose was red?"

"Yes, very red. Do you know where this trail leads?"

"Oh, only to another room and to the palm-garden beyond."

"I have never seen a palm-garden," he said; "please take me to it."

"No," she replied, "for if you have never seen one you must have illusions. In reality they smell of flower-pots, and there is generally water on the floor. Come and I will show you the most uncomfortable seat in the house."

But when they reached the high, gilded sofa, where she had heard the story of the tunnel, Bogardus found for her a foot-stool and a cushion. For himself he chose a low chair, from which he could look up to her enthroned, and the sense of being taken care of brought back a vivid memory of the yellow sleigh.

"And so you have made the acquaintance of Doctor Van Gaasbeck?" she said, bestowing herself comfortably.

"Oh, yes; I wanted to hear the sequel, and doctors can't keep people out," he answered, as though the ruse were quite excusable. "I could not think of any other way."

"And he confided to you his sentiments for Bell?"

"No, not at once. I spoke of Trinity, on New Year's, and as it happened, he had been there. It was all natural enough. Our confidences did not get as far as Mr. Aukes."

"Oh, was not Mr. Aukes amusing!" exclaimed Alida, in time to make it clear that the ex-alderman was responsible for her laugh. "Do you remember?"

Bogardus did remember the speech which she recalled, and mentioned another in his turn which she remembered very well; and presently they were following Bowerie Lane again foot by foot, from the Kissing Bridge to Vauxhall.

Alida confessed to him how she had stolen out with Bell, which part of the expedition the doctor had omitted mention of. Now that he knew Van Gaasbeck the whole affair could be made clear. Of Volkert she explained: "He is a boy I have known all my life. He only does such foolish things because he is young. His father was a

distinguished lawyer, and he is studying law quite seriously."

"Green mint, mum, please, mum?"

The interrupter was the red-nosed footman who had sought the fan.

"No!" cried Alida, with alarming vehemence. "No, no, no! Go away at once and don't come back!"

The footman's wooden face relaxed into a grin, and seating himself deliberately at the further end of the high sofa, he crossed his legs and rested his tray of liquors on his knee.

"I can't keep this thing up another minute," he said, pleadingly, "and what's more I don't want fifty cents."

"Mr. Bogardus," said Alida, sitting erect, "this is Edward Volkert. I don't know how he ever got here, but he has all the evening been masquerading as a footman, and nearly driving me insane. Please tell me what I am to do?"

"Oh, you are not responsible," said Volkert, cheerfully; "just let me rest a moment and I'll be off." To Bogardus he added, "If you don't mind, sir, I should like to return you your tip. There was no fan, of course, I only wanted to do you a good turn. Don't mention it."

"Mr. Volkert," said Bogardus, who seemed to have grasped the situation readily, "will you accept a bit of well-meant advice?"

"No," answered Volkert, "I am rather overstocked with well-meant advice, as Miss Van Wandeleer will tell you."

"Perhaps you will like mine better. Don't go on studying law; your talents lie in quite another direction."

"That is not advice," said Volkert, "that is good sense. You do not happen to know the direction, I suppose?"

"Yes," said the other, seriously, "I know it well, for I have traveled the road myself, but it will take you a long way from Trinity and the Chinese army."

Alida, though greatly interested, cast anxious glances toward the door, through which the notes of German music came floating, modified by Flemish tapestry.

"Edward, would you mind standing up to talk?" she said.

"Or better still, come and see me at the Holland House," Bogardus suggested. "I mean business, I assure you."

"All right," assented Volkert, springing to his feet, and not averse to a postponement. "Have a mint on me?"

Thus another interest grew up between them, a flexible concern for the career of Edward Volkert.

"I should be so thankful if you would talk to him," she said.

"I hope it may result in more than talk," he answered.

Then their thoughts turned again to their own affairs, to the eternal inquiry of youth—you and I—how stand we in the horoscope of life, in trine or square or opposition?

The crystals on her dress had reminded him of snowflakes all through dinner. She had not been very much surprised to see him; people were sure to meet a third time, it was only the second meeting that there was ever any doubt about. He had known Brisbane in the West, and their encounter had been accidental. They agreed that B. J. was a most interesting man.

"The last time he and I dined together, it was at my house," he told her. "We had bacon and potatoes, and in the evening made milk punches. I remember his kneeling by the fire to improvise a nutmeg grater with a nail, a hammer, and a piece of tin. It was as good a nutmeg grater as you ever saw."

"Where was your house?" she asked him, with her eyes upon the tunnel picture; "in the mountains?"

"Yes, ten miles from any other."

"But was it not a difficult place to get milk?" she suggested, with a little laugh that seemed uncalled for, "or did you have a cow?"

"Yes," he replied, "I had a cow. It's quite a complicated story, but I had a cow."

"An Alderney?"

"Yes," he admitted, regarding her suspiciously, "it was an Alderney, and a most intelligent and interesting animal. She understood everything I said to her."

Leaning back against her cushion, Alida laughed again with satisfaction in her own acuteness.

"How very remarkable!" she said; "did you ever try reading Browning to her?"

"Naturally," he answered, gravely, "and there were several passages at which she always ceased to chew."

"Tell me more of your establishment," she commanded, trying to outdo him in solemnity.

"I won't," he answered, shortly, "not another word."

"But you ought to," she protested; "we are going to be acquaintances now, and I should know something of what you have been doing all your life."

"My life," he answered, "began with the new century as the clock struck twelve."

Beyond the tapestries there was a sound of clapping hands, and Alida, rising, said: "The singing is over and we must all be going home."

"Do you think there is a chance of your being lost in the snow soon again?" he asked.

"If it should happen," she rejoined, touching the butterfly upon her shoulder to make certain of that lively insect's well-being, "you may expect a telephone from the Stray Child department. Meanwhile, if you should care to see me in the nursery, my mother is at home on Thursday afternoons."

Bogardus shook his head.

"I can't come yet," he said; "I must be somebody first—I don't care who, but somebody—don't you understand?"

"Yes," said Alida, recalling painfully the effect of his present name upon her relatives, "I think I do, but—" here she held out her hand—"I hope it will be soon."

"Meanwhile," he went on, keeping the hand a moment in both of his, "will you promise to let me know if there is anything I can do—about Volkert or any one else?"

She looked toward the door as though anxious to be gone.

"I ought not to promise that," she answered, hurriedly.

"I think it would be safe enough," he urged; "the contingency is so remote."

"Well—" she hesitated.

"Please promise; it is not much to ask."

"I promise," she said, softly, and when, for a fraction of a second, their eyes had met, she was gone.

In the Brisbane brougham, homeward bound, Alida wondered if it could have been possible to mention Miss Bogardus of Fulham Priory without betraying Cousin Caroline's aversion to the name, and she was glad that she had not tried. She smiled also to recall that he had once read Browning to a cow; but she dismissed the memory of her promise altogether.

One other occurrence of the Billion Dollar Banquet remains to be recorded.

"Beg pardon, miss," said Mr. Love, as he held open the carriage door, "but would you be so kind as to tell me how high Big B. will sell?"

"Big B.!" she repeated, in surprise, "why I think I heard it would sell at one hundred and ten."

"Thank you, miss," said Mr. Love, bringing his fingers to his hat brim, and Mr. Moneypenny, bending from the box, said also: "Thank you, miss."

Perhaps this incident may be of value when the origin of the great house of Moneypenny & Love is under discussion.

CHAPTER XVII

AN INSTRUCTION *IN* FITS

"Upon my word, this must be the January thaw," observed Mr. Ruggles, looking out for the tenth time from the dining-room window on the dreary rectangles of back yards, sad with slush, and for the fifth time repeating his observation with unimportant variations. "Seems like old times to have a January thaw, don't it, Miss De Wint? You and I can remember when it came along as regularly as the collection for Home Missions."

Miss De Wint assented, it being her turn to assent as four other ladies had before assented.

It was Sunday afternoon following the Brisbane dinner, and the rain outside beat sharp staccato notes on every resonant surface, to the accompaniment of metal leaders gurgling dismally.

The Ruggles household was assembled in the dining-room where the light was best, and through the open red mahogany doors the drawing-room looked gloomy and deserted. A Sabbath calm presaging naps was in the atmosphere, though Van Gaasbeck, near a window, held a book, and

Miss Toll assorted small envelopes with the assiduity of one who plays a game of patience.

Edward Volkert, ever the most wakeful, occupied the dinner-table with the many supplements of a Sunday paper, which he rustled continually; and from time to time he read aloud such items as he thought of general interest.

"Hello! listen to this," he said, smoothing before him a column headed, "Wall Street Gossip of the Week." "'The Billion Dollar Banquet Bears Fruit.' That may be good sense, but it sounds queer! Now we may learn something of Miss Van Wandeleer and the Octopus. 'Wild rumors current in the street for several days gave place to equally extravagant assertions yesterday. These came too late to have a marked effect upon the short Saturday session, but unless some unusually stiff denials should be forthcoming, the Monday opening will be watched with interest. It was admitted freely—almost too freely, perhaps—by those possessing inside information, that the greatest railway deal of history had gone through. No less than twenty roads are said to have signed a protocol, the terms of which are cheerfully indefinite. Of course the moving spirit in this new Arabian enchantment is our respected fellow townsman, Ben Jonson Brisbane, to whom be credit given. And that no element of picturesque similitude be lacking, it

is further declared that a certain Billion Dollar Banquet, with which the public has been stuffed to surfeit, was eaten to celebrate the final burial of a gross of hatchets.

" 'On the other hand, we are told that Uncle Horace has declared, with characteristic candor, that the Big B. can't be bought. Which leaves the conservative investor in a position to keep on guessing.' "

"Ah, yes, indeed," said Mr. Ruggles, who still thought fondly of the sums he might have made if he had only been on the other side of the market in times past. "A man could make a fortune easily if he only knew whether Brisbane was going to control Big B."

"But he is," protested Alida, "I heard him say—"

"Alida," cried Cousin Caroline, "I have no idea of what you are talking, but if you must associate with stock-brokers at least you need not be an eavesdropper."

"I did not think of that," Alida declared, in confusion.

"Oh, let her tell!" protested Volkert. "Come Doctor, let's get hold of her and torture her; you've got a pincers in your pocket, haven't you?"

"What is that you are going to do, Edward?" demanded Grandma Epps, who had been dozing.

"Oh, only pull out a few of Miss Van Wandeleer's teeth."

"You mustn't do it, Edward, I forbid it," murmured Grandma Epps, relapsing into slumber.

"Well, that's the only thing that saved her," Volkert said, resignedly. "Here is all about the party in another place," and again turning to the paper, he pretended to read: " 'The dresses of the ladies were unique, and all paid for: Miss Lidy Van Wandeleer wore blue stuff and spangles; ornaments, a heart upon the sleeve; Miss Betsy Brisbane, watermelon pink with black seeds; Mrs. Harrie Fosdick, a purple skirt—the waist was out of sight; Mr. Edward Volkert, a dress suit hired for the occasion at great expense—' "

"Edward," murmured Grandma Epps, "be silent!" which admonition was obeyed until the entrance of Bell a moment later.

"There was a wild report on 'Change that you had gone to Sunday school, and all the heathen were selling short," he said, as Bell closed the door.

"I changed my mind," she answered, laughing, for since New Year's night Bell laughed much more easily than before, and Volkert's standing had materially improved with certain members of the household. Perhaps it was a

coincidence, but Bell's change of mind had come to her after Mrs. Van Gaasbeck had ascended for her nap.

Presently, one by one, all the elders ascended or descended, and the four young people were alone.

"I suggest that Doctor Van Gaasbeck read aloud to us," said Alida. "I am sure his book looks suitable and improving."

"I am afraid it would not interest you," returned the doctor, flushing slightly; "it is just a book of travel lent me by a patient."

"In what country?" asked Alida, with interest.

"Oh, in the West," he answered, thrusting down the book beside him. "It is not at all well written."

"I should think it would be very interesting," persisted Alida, who had of late developed a faculty for adding two and two. "The West is so full of resources."

"Especially horned cattle," suggested Volkert, absently, through his paper.

"One need not go near where they are," said Alida, overlooking a rather obvious two; "I mean the mountain part where the scenery is beautiful."

"I wish we could all go there," sighed Bell, though the "all" was prompted largely by politeness. "I wish that we were anywhere but here."

"We don't, do we, Alida?" exclaimed Volkert, sweeping the supplements to the floor and springing to his feet. "We like the merry tinkle of the mandolin, we like to be in touch with great events."

Crossing to the mirror he stood a moment arranging his hair, and when he turned, a surprising metamorphosis had taken place.

"How is this? Anything like?" he asked.

His lips were drawn together in an expression of firm determination; his brow had taken on new lines, and upon his forehead lay the long, black curl of the dollar mark. The suggestion of Mr. Brisbane was so strong that Alida cried at once: "How wonderful! I could almost believe that Mr. Brisbane were standing there himself!"

"Really!" said Bell, with interest, and Van Gaasbeck wiped his heavy glasses for a better view.

"Oh, that is nothing," Volkert declared, much gratified, and impelled to further efforts. "Wait till I work it up a little. Now watch me do the president in full view of the audience."

"Oh, that is immense!" the doctor cried, in unfeigned admiration, and Bella Junior clapped her hands in honor of the president.

"Coquelin in 'L'Aiglon,'" announced Volkert, and behold! Coquelin appeared.

After this he gave other imitations of celebrities, and ended by drawing in his lips, and otherwise contorting his features till they all, with one accord, cried: "Grandma Epps!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Alida, laughing in spite of herself, and Bell said, "You should be on the comic stage."

"I've thought of that," admitted the comedian, with a wink toward Alida, "but true art there is not appreciated. Why, Doctor," he continued to Van Gaasbeck, "there is a fellow at the Cosmopolitan who brings down the house every night by having a fit, and I don't believe he knows what a real fit looks like."

"He should take a turn in our emergency ward," replied the doctor; "we do them there most scientifically."

"That's what I say," went on the realist. "Now tell me, did you ever see a fit like this?"

As Volkert finished speaking, his neck appeared to lose its stiffness, his head dropped forward on his chest, his mouth fell open, and his eyes turned up until the whites alone were visible, while with his fingers bent he clawed the air.

"Stop that this instant!" cried Alida and Bell together, and Volkert stopped.

"Is that like any fit you ever saw?" he asked.

"Not in the least," replied the doctor, frankly, adding with professional nicety. "By a fit we generally mean *epilepsia gravior*, which is commonly preceded by a scream or cry, due to the convulsive action of the muscles of the larynx. If the patient is standing he immediately falls, and often sustains serious injury. Unconsciousness is complete, and the muscles are in a state of tonic contraction. The head is turned by a series of jerks to one or other shoulder, the eyes roll wildly, the teeth are gnashed together, and the tongue and cheeks are often severely bitten."

"If you attempt to do anything of that sort, I'll leave the room," said Alida to the comedian, and Bella added to Van Gaasbeck, "If you tell him any more, I'll never speak to you again."

"All right," acquiesced Mr. Volkert, amiably; "much obliged, Doctor, for the tonic contractions. If permitted I would do a fit from Fitville, but as it is, I will now give you, by request, an imitation of a gentleman going out into the rain." Turning up his trousers, he left the room not to return.

"I am sorry for that boy," said Bell; "he does not appear to have the least ambition, and I am afraid he must know the queerest sort of people."

"I am sure of that," replied Alida, recalling Mr. Rooney.

After this Van Gaasbeck offered to read "The Blessed Damozel," if Bell would produce Rossetti, and Miss Van Wandeleer retired to write the letter enjoined by tact.

Alida's bedroom was at the end of a hall and next to one larger occupied by Mrs. Van Gaasbeck. As she passed that lady's door, it opened slightly and closed again with what sounded like a click of satisfaction, for Mrs. Van Gaasbeck was still upon the minaret, though with a face set resolutely in the wrong direction.

It rained again on Monday, but Alida, suitably protected, went to Jefferson Market with Bell, whose suddenly developed interest in practical matters had made her much more companionable of late. In the spirit of adventure they pursued their way a little into Greenwich, where attracted by a placard, they inspected a vacant flat. It was a purposeless proceeding, and entailed unnecessary steps on the part of a worthy German janitor, but Bell regarded it seriously; and as Alida saw how wistfully her eyes took in the meager details of small dingy rooms, and cold, ill-smelling closets, she thought that if she were Providence, Bessie Brisbane should have one dress the less and Bell her flat.

"I do not like this paper very much," said

Bell, pretending to weigh the question of tenancy in her mind, and the janitor assured her that a year's lease would entitle her to choose another.

"Really!" said Bell, "how very nice. I should choose something striped to make the ceilings higher."

They talked of the flat all the way home, and Alida made some excellent suggestions. "Of course it is all years and years away," said Bell; "but you know things do happen that one doesn't expect."

"Always," replied Alida, with conviction.

That afternoon the newspaper boys made an unusual clamor with the evening editions, and at dinner the table learned from Edward Volkert that Wall Street was in a frenzy of excitement. The great Transcontinental deal had not been denied, and stocks were flying up and down as the effect for good or ill became apparent. Big B. had led the dance, climbing to altitudes before unscaled. Fortunes were tossed about like bales of straw. Millionaires were penniless, and office boys drove home in cabs. And about the facts, the great American reporter wove garlands of his own untrammeled fancy.

Alida borrowed the papers, and tried to glean from them what B. J.'s position in the tumult might be. But while one journal held strongly

that Brisbane and his kind were fitting subjects for the electric chair, the other spoke of him as a benefactor to humanity. It seemed clear, however, from both accounts, that Bessie could now have a regiment of men in fur, and a Russian sleigh for each, if so disposed.

It was like a fairy tale, this narrative of poor, and presumably deserving, persons elevated to sudden opulence, and Alida pursued the reading of it until she was left in the dining-room alone. It was there that Mary brought a letter from the late delivery.

The letter seemed at first a strange composite of a circular and a bill, and Alida read it through twice before its true significance dawned upon her. In text it ran:

MISS A. VAN WANDELEER:

Dear Madam—In compliance with instructions, we have this day sold for your account and risk five hundred shares of Big B. common stock at seventy-seven, as per statement inclosed. As we understand it to be your wish to close your account with this transaction, we take pleasure in handing you herewith our check for balance to your credit.

Trusting to be favored with your further valued orders, we beg to remain,

Very truly yours,

JACOB & SANDERSON,

(Inclosure $9,869.50.) Per J.

The check inclosed was of a pretty pink.

Alida's first thought was that somehow in the mad lottery of which she had been reading, a prize had fallen to her, just as prizes had fallen to the office boys who rode home in cabs. If blessings were descending—if it were raining mush, as B. J. had expressed it—but when the sequence reached Mr. Brisbane, the mystery solved itself, and Jacob grew at once distinct from Sanderson.

B. J. had played his little joke, but Alida was not sure whether to be amused or not. Perhaps it was true that the smooth Mr. Jacob had done something for her account and risk; and perhaps again it was only B. J.'s way of making her a present. It would be pleasant to have nearly ten thousand dollars of one's own if rightly come by; but it would be another matter to receive donations under cover of commercial phrases.

Alida wished heartily that she had some one to advise her, but it must be some one who would understand the circumstances; some one who knew Brisbane; some one whose judgment she herself could trust implicitly. And there was but one person in whom all these conditions were fulfilled.

Having reached this conclusion, Miss Van Wandeleer wisely determined to relieve herself of further anxiety by making it irrevocable. She rang the messenger call and wrote a note, and

when the messenger arrived she sent him with it to the Holland House. It was a short note and a formal; as formal as a note might be which distinctly suggested a meeting at the Metropolitan Museum, at the given hour of half past three the following day.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BURDEN *OF* NINEVEH

As the north-bound Madison Avenue car emerged from the tunnel at Fortieth Street, Alida, from the window, noted the station clock, which is always fast, to indicate ten minutes past the hour. And this being the time which she wanted it to be, she composed herself for two more brown-stone miles.

Outwardly, she differed little from any other young lady of an upper Madison Avenue car at three P. M., who happens to possess a gray costume, new undressed gloves, a Bazet hat, and a spotted veil, and her mental attitude, in spite of her errand, was not a study in psychology.

Miss Van Wandeleer seldom allowed herself to do injustice to her intuitions by seeking reasons to sustain them, holding such a course unworthy, like questioning the sincerity of her friends, like admitting possibility of error in her conception of herself or of her race. To her, conventions, commandments, and sanitary regulations, excellent institutions in themselves, would have no reason for existence upon a planet peopled solely by Van Wandeleers.

Once only between Kenilworth Place and the Assyrian Gallery did she falter, hesitate, experience the twinges of regret, and this upon the very threshold of the Metropolitan Museum. She had forgotten that Tuesday was not a free day.

"I am afraid this was rather a difficult place to find," she said to Anthony directly, when one step into the Assyrian Room had brought her face to face with him, "but I thought as you would be sure to come here sooner or later, it would not be so much of an imposition."

"Oh, I had planned to devote this afternoon to the Museum," he said.

"Before you received my note?"

"Oh, long before."

Alida suspected this to be untrue in letter, but the story of his hour already passed in research seemed more probable, for he had checked his overcoat and bought a catalogue, which made his presence there seem much less prearranged.

"You reached home safely the other evening, of course?" he asked, neither indifferently nor with too great concern. Aside from his old way of taking everything for granted—her friendship, his right to serve her, their unquestionable understanding each of the other—the meeting might have been an accident.

"I have been rather puzzled about something

connected with that evening," she began, discarding the preamble she had arranged; "not Edward Volkert, but something else."

"To me it was a puzzling evening altogether," he said, laughing. "I know very little of society—almost nothing—but I am sure no one but B. J. Brisbane could have given such a party. When I left, the clergyman was asleep in an armchair and Tannhäuser had come back for supper. You must excuse me if I'm not sufficiently surprised."

"Mine is a long and complicated story," said Alida.

"Then let me recommend my backless bench," he answered.

The bench, which was in an alcove surrounded upon three sides by great fragments of an Assyrian frieze, afforded a convenient public privacy where conversation might range at will from sentiment to human-headed lions. It was a spot where one—or two—might spend an hour or a day without exciting comment.

"Now, to begin with," said Alida, when they were seated, "you must read this," and she produced the broker's letter from her muff.

"Rather gratifying, I should say," he remarked in comment, after mastering the contents with surprising rapidity.

"And here is the check."

"I don't think that a very safe way to carry valuable documents," he said, laughing, as he took the small pink paper, now slightly crumpled. "You see a certified check is almost like money."

"Oh, I've been very careful," she explained; "I've kept it folded in my glove."

He listened with attention as she told the few circumstances of B. J.'s joke, and of her own surprise at its result, and when she asked if it were possible for Messrs. Jacob and Sanderson to have done anything for her account and risk to produce so much money in so short a time, he said: "Yes, yesterday it could have been done easily. You were but one of a great number who happened to be in luck. I fancy Brisbane must be richer by a million or so."

She sat in silence for a moment, folding the pink check smaller without knowing what she did, her eyes upon the human-headed lions of the frieze, leaving him at liberty to make small discoveries; that she wore a miniature golf club in her back hair; that her muff was preserved from falling by a braided cord about her neck; that the gray thumb smoothing the check was like an infant mouse. He might have learned further that her eyelashes touched her veil, or noticed the little wisp of warm hair across a small, pink ear, but perhaps he had observed those things before. When, presently, she

turned to him again, it took him a perceptible fraction of a second to recall what they had been speaking of.

"I don't know how to go on," she said, helplessly; "I don't know how to make you understand exactly what my difficulty is."

"Perhaps I am not as stupid as you think," he answered. "Let me tell you a parable. There was once a man, out West of course—and by the way, the story is impossible—a man, who having no money to gamble with, went into a faro bank to look on at the game. As it happened, at the moment of his arrival at the table, a ray of sunlight fell through a knot-hole in the roof directly on a certain card, making a round bright spot the exact size of a silver dollar. Now the dealer, mistaking this for a bet, went on to deal, and as the newcomer had apparently won he was paid several material dollars. The sequel was naturally a fabulous fortune, won from no other venture than a sunbeam."

"Just like mine," Alida suggested, thoughtfully.

"Only as far as the first investment goes," he answered. "My man was thoroughly dishonest, while your good luck is yours by every right."

"Every right?"

"Yes, every legal right."

"But I had no money either."

"Mr. Brisbane became your surety, and as he knew just how things were to go, he took no risk."

"Why did he do so, do you think?"

"Through pure good will, let us say. He would be capable of that; I have known him willing to do much more for a man who had no claim whatever upon him."

"A man who showed him where to make a tunnel?" she inquired.

"Yes," he answered, laughing; "I forgot that that must have been a part of the cow story."

"Ah, I remember now," she cried, seeing her way with sudden clearness. "And you refused to profit then by his good will!"

"That was a business matter," he protested, flushing slightly; "I had been paid already on my own terms. I could not take what I had not earned. The two cases are not at all alike."

"How do they differ?" she demanded, looking at him, fixedly.

Though his lips were parted for a ready answer he changed his purpose suddenly, and asked: "Do you want me to tell you my real opinion?"

"If I had thought you would not," she answered, "I should never, never have asked you to come here."

"But suppose I should tell you not to keep that check?"

"Then I should only be sure that I had been right myself from the first," she answered, resolutely, and carefully unfolding the pink paper she as carefully tore off the signature of Jacob Sanderson, naïvely confident that thus might credit balances be disposed of.

As she looked up half roguishly through her spotted veil, as a child who has with malice aforethought destroyed its toy, he said: "I don't think you will ever be sorry for that."

"Indeed I shall," she answered. "I am sorry now, and I shall be sorry whenever I want one of a thousand things I always want and cannot afford. But fortunately I shall now have some one else to blame."

"Me?" he inquired, rather liking the idea.

"Yes," she replied, "whenever I have to go without anything—I suppose some people would consider that ingratitude."

She spoke the last words in a lowered voice, for a visitor had come into the alcove—an old, loud-breathing gentleman, whose coat was wrinkled in the back. He scanned the human lions heads with care, as though he hoped to find among them the portrait of a friend. And as each examination brought a louder breath, the others assumed a disappointment. But all they ever really knew of him was that his coat was wrinkled in the back. When he had gone on,

breathing, Anthony asked: "Would you be very much offended if I were to call you a brick?"

"Not in the least," she answered, laughing. "Am I really a brick?"

"Unquestionably you are—a brick."

"Thank you," said Alida, holding out her hand, because he appeared to expect this recognition of his compliment. But she withdrew it almost instantly, whispering: "Here comes another!" and they composed themselves to a renewed study of Assyrian lions.

"Richard!" spoke a voice behind them, "Richard Van Gaasbeck! What brings you here?" and the voice was unmistakably that of Mrs. Bruyn Van Gaasbeck. There had always been a small minority, lax in principle, who had found excuses for the late Bruyn in his taste for leading ladies.

"Oh!" cried Alida, standing up, and her companion, recognizing a minor catastrophe, rose also. But Mrs. Van Gaasbeck, deserted wife and doting mother, was first of all a woman of the world.

"Why, dear Miss Van Wandeleer!" she exclaimed, in amiable surprise, "I had no thought of seeing you here. You must forgive me, really. I was to meet my son with his cousin—Lucy Strong from Boston—here this afternoon. You know how absurd those Boston people are about chaperons! And I meant to startle them. It

was so very stupid—near-sighted as I am, I might have made a serious mistake. Pray do not let me disturb you."

As Mrs. Van Gaasbeck, sweetly smiling, moved a step away, Alida's impulse was to let her go in peace, but intuition urged a wiser course.

"I am sure the mistake was most natural," she said. "I look so much like Lucy Strong. (There was no Lucy Strong.) Please tell me if you remember anything about Nineveh. We were trying to make out. Oh, let me introduce Mr. Bogardus."

Mrs. Van Gaasbeck expressed her gratification and renewed her explanations.

"My son," she said, "so often wears brown gloves. Perhaps you know my son?"

"I think I have that pleasure," was the unexpected answer, and the lady with whom "placing" new acquaintances was a sacred duty, said: "Not professionally, I trust?"

"Yes, quite professionally," Anthony rejoined. "I am one of his most admiring patients," which being an unpromising lead, Mrs. Van Gaasbeck tried another.

"Your name is so familiar to me," she said. "I had a school friend once who must have been a relative of yours. Alida, my dear, you must have heard your Cousin Caroline often speak of Anita Bogardus."

"Oh, yes," replied Alida, eagerly, "often; they were at Fulham Priory together."

"Not at school together," corrected Mrs. Van Gaasbeck, "but they met there some years later, when your cousin went there for a visit. Her brother was always at the house. It was all so sad."

"I should not call it sad," returned Alida, at a venture. She knew that Anthony was listening, and hoped with all her heart to bring about disclosures without allowing Mrs. Van Gaasbeck the pleasure of disclosing.

"Ah, would you not, my dear?" went on that lady. "You Dutch have your own way of looking at such things. Caroline behaved all through with spirit, though some people thought she went a step too far in blaming Doctor Groesbeck, just because he performed the ceremony, which the poor man had a perfect right to do."

"What ceremony do you mean?" asked Alida, betraying her ignorance of family history in anxiety to learn the truth. Even Anthony, standing motionless beside them, could not be more eager for the answer."

"What! don't you know?" cried Mrs. Van Gaasbeck, highly gratified. "You Dutch are so close-mouthed. Is it possible you have never heard that Anita Bogardus married your Cousin Caroline's brother, Anthony, who ran away to

the West, and died almost immediately? Now, for goodness' sake, don't say I told you, but it is absurd to make a secret of what everybody knew all about at the time. I am going now, before I put my foot in it again. Good by, Mr. Bogardus. I hope you are not related to any one we have been talking of. Do drop in and see my son again without waiting to get ill. Good by, Alida, dear, it's so nice to see a girl of your age interested in intellectual things. Was it not odd our running across each other here? I shall tell Richard all about it."

When they were alone again in the alcove, Alida did not speak at once. She would have liked to have gone away in silence, leaving him to realize the significance of what he had heard. She wished that he could have heard it from another source, and told her afterward of his own accord. It seemed in some way that she was an intruder and where she had no right to be, that when he spoke he must conceal his joy from her, and that her own gratification must seek a meaningless, conventional expression. Then she knew that he was close beside her.

"My cousin Alida!" he whispered.

"My cousin Anthony De Wint," she answered, without looking up.

"That is the first time I have ever heard my own name," he said.

"Hush," Alida whispered, warningly; "here comes some one else."

"We have here reproduced in absolute facsimile, a fragment of the walls of ancient Nineveh." It was the voice of speculative archæology in a familiar field. "These lions with human heads, typifying strength and intelligence, are guardians of the gates of Paradise. But unlike the Western fable, the Assyrian legend runs that Adam and Eve are still in Eden under their protection. Young ladies, if you will kindly step this way, the light—"

The young ladies appeared to derive much satisfaction from the symbols of primeval bliss before them, but later Alida said: "I can't believe I ever was a horrid school-girl."

"I'm very sure you never were," replied her cousin—her fourth cousin—Anthony.

They had left the lions, passed through the mummies' dormitory, and were in the lobby where the Bacchante makes herself at home before the Greek philosophers, who would never have come had they known what the entertainment was to be.

"Everything will be arranged much better when the new wing is open," Alida remarked, objectively.

"Yes, that will be a great improvement," he assented.

When she asked what the time was, and he had told her nearly five, she declared that it would be dark before she reached Kenilworth Place.

"I shall assert my right to see you there in safety," he responded.

"Thank you; that will be very nice," she said.

He had had no rights to assert when, tucked in the yellow sleigh, he brought her home in safety before, but then she had not been his cousin, and she had not thought it necessary to thank him for coming miles to read the broker's letter when he was not the nephew of Miss Caroline De Wint.

"Of course you will wish to see your aunt," she said.

Alida spoke constrainedly, for since the climax of Mrs. Van Gaasbeck's disclosure, the afternoon had lost something of its zest, grown tamer, quieter, as though a breeze had fallen. They had so much to talk of in their new relationship, the difficulty was only where to begin. But there need be no hurry to begin, now that their meetings were to depend no more upon chance. Long evenings would be theirs, and rainy afternoons when they might laugh at the odd acquaintance that had turned out so well. Even if Miss De Wint should not like her nephew, she would be glad to find a claimant for

the Tankard and the Spoon. It was all to end as a story should, though not an exciting story. When one, from watching a sunset, is called in to tea, it is possible to appreciate the tea and still regret the sunset.

"My aunt!" he said, recalling her words, after an unresponsive moment. "Oh, yes, I shall see her of course, after I have found this Doctor Groesbeck, if he is still living."

Alida told him of the clergyman's exchange to Wilmington, and he declared that he would travel there without delay.

As they came out upon the esplanade overlooking the park, the winter sun was setting red behind the obelisk. Far to the south rose the blue city under rosy clouds of steam. The drive was gay with carriages, for the snow had gone, and along the paths came knots of chattering people hurrying supperward. Through the gathering shadows the ruddy home-lights had begun to glow, and along the avenue a chain of violet stars stretched out toward the merry night.

"Is it not beautiful?" Alida cried. "Is it not enough to be a part of it, to be alive, and in New York?"

"You do not know what it is to be alone here—all alone—as I was once for just three hours," he said half laughing.

"I should not think three hours very long to be alone anywhere," she replied, as they went down the steps.

"Perhaps not, when you know there is to be an end of it," he said; "but I did not know how many months and years I was to be an unconsidered ghost in all the rush of life. It was enough to drive a man to desperate deeds, and it drove me to call on Miss De Wint."

Possibly had Alida given him the opportunity he would have explained why he had found that visit a cure for loneliness, but she did not.

"You really should know something of your aunt," she said; "and first of all, she will expect you to be proud of being a De Wint."

"I shall have to become accustomed to the name before attempting to cultivate a pride in it," he answered.

In the car she gave him further information, scraps of family history, and personal anecdotes of Cousin Caroline's charity and general excellence, of which no nephew should be ignorant. It should not be her fault if Miss De Wint's newfound kinsman were wanting in either admiration or esteem.

When they left the car and started westward the sidewalks already felt the influence of closing time, but here the homing people went with heavier feet than those about the obelisk. After

Lenox Hill, below Fourteenth Street looked careworn and down at the heel.

Twilight had fallen, and the sky above the Jersey hills was cold and purple; the wind came up keen from the western river, and Kenilworth Place was not a spot to linger in. It was the hour when day throws down her halberd and night comes grumbling to the watch; the time of neither dog nor wolf; the retrocessional of light.

"Won't you come in and see your aunt?" she asked, with a half-hearted smile.

"Oh, no," he said; "I'm sure my aunt will keep."

When they had mounted the steps in silence he pulled the bell handle and they heard the answering jingle from the basement. While they stood dully counting seconds there came a sound of shuffling feet in the hall within, and the flash of Mary's apron through the ground-glass door; then the turning of the knob; gas, and a smell of soup. There was the walnut hatrack with Edward Volkert's overcoat upon it, and Mr. Ruggles's shabby little hat; the checkered marble floor, and the long weary stairs.

"Good by," she said, and no one could have guessed what a comprehensive good by she meant, least of all De Wint, who did not appear to hear it.

"Miss Van Wandeleer," he said, by no means

taking Mary into his confidence, "when you think of this afternoon, don't forget the fellow without a name whom you sent for because he was your friend."

Alida flushed and hung her head. "I don't know what has become of him," she said, with something like a sob.

"He has not gone very far; he will never be very far away when you want him," he answered, looking not at her but toward the purple sky, where the lights of Hoboken already shone like stars; and as he paused, Alida waited for him to speak again. She had come to where the trail before her was no longer plain. It was like New Year's night once more in the snow, and as then, she presently felt herself caught up and carried past the drift.

"Would you not like to see Trinity again?" he asked, turning to her confidently; "I mean by daylight, when all the people are about. Won't you come there to-morrow, at any time?"

"I could not come to-morrow, unless I were to tell several stories," she answered, quietly.

"Please don't do that," he protested, laughing. "Shall it be Thursday?"

"Yes, I can come on Thursday morning."

It had been a century since a Miss Van Wandeleer had given such an answer, but no one of them all had paid a higher tribute to the family

dignity than did Alida in forgetting it. She had also come home poorer by ten thousand dollars and forgotten that.

"Good night," said Anthony; "I shall go to Wilmington to-morrow and look up Doctor Groesbeck."

"Good night, and come back safe," she said.

CHAPTER XIX

MR. NOBODY *OF* NOWHERE

Mrs. Nick Norris, popularly believed to be undergoing reincarnation on a lower plane in consequence of neglected social duties as a Roman matron, was to give a theater party on Wednesday evening. For, it being a part of her condemnation to have the smallest possible house, and the worst possible servants, her incessant expiations commonly took this form. Judged by present suffering endured, the Roman matron must have been indeed remiss. An active hoodoo stood behind Mrs. Norris's chair, or rode upon her box, or ran ahead to announce her coming at the inn, and it had grown to be a cheerful custom among her guests to lay small wagers on his antics.

Mrs. Norris appeared in Kenilworth Place at half past nine in the morning upon a round of calls intended to make sure no epidemic had broken out among her invitees. She had been careful to consult a lady who had seen the play—Mr. Nobody of Nowhere—and pronounced the plot above reproach. She was also in a position to assure all anxious parents that the friendships

of the star were quite platonic. Alida must, if possible, be ready at half past seven, as the automobile omnibus would begin its rounds at Kenilworth Place, and everybody would be sure to keep it waiting. It was to be a perfectly new automobile, never before used, and therefore free from possible infection. Abbreviated dinners were to be compensated for later at the Holland House, where Mr. Norris was to pass the evening in watching a certain most desirable table. He had determined that this time nothing should go wrong, was Mrs. Norris's last assurance, though to those who knew Nick Norris better than did his wife, the statement might have carried less conviction.

"My dear, be thankful that you don't keep house," she said to Mrs. Van Wandeleer, at parting. "Since fall we have had Finns, Swedes, Portuguese, and Poles, and to-morrow we begin with Japs."

Mrs. Norris did not call at half past seven, having changed her route and called for others of the party first. So when the long, black omnibus backed up, some twenty minutes late, before the Ruggles's door, it was already half filled with girls in opera cloaks, and men with bandaged throats. The hostess, from her seat beside the door, called her excuses for remaining there, which were unnecessary, as all the men were on

the steps to render aid and comfort to the new recruit. Mrs. Norris was sure she had forgotten some one, but fortunately recalled that the forgotten one had sent regrets.

"Tell him to drive to twenty-nine, West. No, tell him fourteen, East. No, no, we have been there. Tell him to take the list and drive where he pleases."

The girls sat all together at one end as snugly as their dresses would permit. The men, a body-guard about their hostess, sat ever ready to leap out like willing stevedores at every halting place. No chaperon could wish a greater sinecure.

There were a dozen altogether when Mrs. Norris's list was told; healthy, happy men and girls, a little conscious of being well dressed, and more than a little conscious of the mildly bohemian character of the conveyance. They might have mated at random with the blessings of respective families, and they might have made the traverse of the continent without the watchful eye of Mrs. Norris and come back none the worse. Secretly they thought themselves the product of a civilization that is a little better than any other civilization, the children of a city that is a little better than any other city, and if they were wrong they would never find it out.

Alida was in her element among them, and accepted the half-serious primacy they accorded

her half seriously. She knew, as they knew, that without her Mrs. Norris's theater party would be something less of a success, that should the story of the night be told in current print her name would be the first among those present. But youth comes by nature, and to be well favored is the gift of God, and only those who have not these things think twice about them.

"Does any one know where we are going?" inquired a small girl, whose straight, short nose and mousy eyes looked from the aperture of a very high fur collar, and the nearest man replied: "Where should we go with Miss Van Wandeleer aboard except to the Knickerbocker?"

"Alida, you're the only pebble on the beach," remarked the mousy girl, complainingly. "Nobody ever picks out a theater for me."

"I think the Bijou is closed," replied Alida, and her reputation being well established everybody laughed, and the youngest gentleman rang up several fares.

May Norris tried to tell a story, but observing that her mother listened, forgot the point, which was more amusing than the story could have been, and reminded Johnny Alexander of something he had heard at Weber and Fields.

Once started, everybody talked at once, and at the Twenty-third Street crossing, a reckless cross-town car contributed its measure of diver-

sion. As they passed the Holland House some one feigned to discover Nick Norris guarding the table.

"Great heaven! he is not alone," cried Johnny Alexander, and Mrs. Norris mentally scratched him from her eligible list.

The party comfortably filled two lower boxes—Mrs. Norris was determined to have no heart burnings in the matter of front seats—and when the butler Norris, whom Mr. Alexander playfully pronounced an Esquimaux, had distributed flowers, with clumsy but impartial hands, there remained nothing, so far as one particular party was concerned, to delay the rising of the curtain.

During the overture Nick Norris bustled in to shake hands with every one. He was a neat, dark little gentleman, who fitted his clothes to perfection, and ever looked as though his hair had just been cut. When he had lamented his wife's tyranny in excluding him from the evening's pleasure, and had promised good behavior if allowed to see one act, he went away and did not come back.

Alida was gratified to discover the Brisbanes in an opposite box, and Bessie, in response to her nod of recognition, held an upturned palm beneath her ear, and wagged it knowingly. Mrs. Brisbane beamed Martini, and B. J., from his corner, inclined the dollar mark.

A former girl friend of Bessie's from the West

was also of the party; Miss Brisbane made occasional experiments with former friends, but it was ever after their departure that Alida found her most affectionate. This left a number of the seats unused, which must have occasioned Mrs. Brisbane secret pangs of conscience.

Presently the play began. It was a good play, and the English company justified its fame. But to Alida's mind the plot would have been truer to life had the heroine recognized the obvious merits of Mr. Nobody before his social position—for a while in doubt—became duly established. She had also little patience with a hero who refrained from speaking plainly, for no reason but to save the author's situation. In the intermissions all the party conversed discreetly, and posed a little.

Once, while one of the younger men explained why a certain yacht was less desirable than a certain other yacht, Alida allowed herself a furtive survey of the balcony, and among the tiers of indistinguishable faces two separated themselves, as familiar faces will. They were in the second row and near the center, and presently some little individuality of movement removed all doubt that Edward Volkert was there with Serena Schepmoes. The incident amused Alida, and she found the novelette suggested by it more entertaining than the yacht.

"Miss Van Wandeleer," began Johnny Alexander, when the yachtsman had been dispossessed, "I want to make a bet with you. Forty roses to a cigarette, that you will say 'yes' to my next question!"

"Done!" said Alida, recklessly.

"Will you dance the Brisbane cotillion with yours obediently?"

"Yes," she answered, laughing, "but I thought you did not know them."

"I don't," said Mr. Alexander; "you will have to engineer my invitation."

"Then I shall tell Bessie all the circumstances and leave it to her generosity. My saying 'yes' put you completely at her mercy, you know."

"Oh, the Brisbane charity is celebrated for its breadth," rejoined Johnny Alexander, with patrician patronage. "Just look at the two deserving subjects they are taking aboard now!"

Alida, looking, perceived a movement in the Brisbane box, occasioned by the arrival of the subjects.

"Do you know who they are?" she asked of Johnny Alexander.

"One, I should guess by his smile, to be a floor-walker," he said, judicially; "and the other, perhaps, something in the sock department. Please don't think me snobby. I quite look up to retail dry goods, I assure you."

"That is very nice of you, indeed," returned Alida, with a smile of recognition for some one in the charitable box. "I'm sure no one would appreciate it more than Lord Wensdale."

"Lord Wensdale!" repeated Johnny Alexander, unabashed. "The bounding Briton, who has just acquired the Cattle Trust! I wonder how much of the forty million B. J. captured!" Then, forgetting dry goods, he inquired, pleadingly: "Miss Van Wandeleer, do you think you could be happy with the love of an honest man, and forty millions?"

Alida did not answer this, for the well-known state of Mr. Alexander's finances left ample time for a decision.

Meanwhile Mrs. Norris, after amicable signals, was preparing to run up the Union Jack.

"If I thought they would come, I'd ask them to supper in a minute," she told Alida, confidentially. "One feels so sorry for strangers, and they are not with the Brisbanes. I saw them leave their own seats in the orchestra. Nick met them yesterday at the club, and as we happened to be giving a little dinner at Sherry's he invited them at once. We should like to be treated in just that way if we were in a foreign country."

"Yes, shouldn't we?" assented Johnny Alexander, with feeling, as the curtain rose upon the third act.

This was the well-known act wherein the heroine ascends a cherry tree, and a stupid servant takes away the ladder. She was charming, sitting on the bough and throwing fruit into her lover's mouth, and the final leap into his arms upon the apparition of stern paternity was cleverly accomplished.

"And as for you, sir, my stable boys shall thrash you!" spoke paternity, and it was then that Alida thought Mr. Nobody should have declared himself at the risk of ending the performance.

During the next entre'acte Old Wenny, accompanied by Mr. Howlet, made a visit of ceremony. They recalled the Sherry dinner pleasantly, and would have been most happy to have supped with Mrs. Norris had not an engagement—"

"Those new people are so pushing!" sighed the matron inwardly, but outwardly she smiled and murmured: "Some other night this week, I hope."

Only Lord Wensdale could reach Alida's side conveniently—Mr. Alexander had slipped out for a cigarette—and in the short conversation between them he told of his safe return, the happy arrival of the caribou's head uninjured, and two clever sayings of Miss Brisbane. Indicating three vacant seats, he said: "We are expecting to have with us a chap whose train has been

delayed somewhere between here and Wilmington."

"Wilmington?" Alida repeated. "There has not been an accident, I hope."

"Oh, no, he'll turn up later for a bit of supper with us. Perhaps you have met him at the Brisbanes, by the way. His name is Bogardus."

"If you mean Anthony Bogardus, he is my cousin," replied Alida, blushing prettily.

"I see," said Wensdale, which might mean much or little.

"And do you know him well?" she asked.

"We met in connection with this cattle deal," explained the earl; "but I have rarely liked a man so well on short acquaintance. I am charmed to hear you are related, really charmed. The family should be proud of him. At his age such ability is quite unheard of. You have a wonderful country, Miss Van Wandeleer, a land of miracles."

She wondered why Lord Wensdale should have introduced national resources with such abruptness, but supposed he had found himself going further than he intended in the praises of her kinsman.

"I am glad you are pleased with the country," she remarked.

"We like your country very much," he went on, smiling; "but I confess we like its products

better. The chief product, Miss Van Wandeleer, is dividends, you know, and we old fogies on the other side are rather fond of dividends; we all bow down to the almighty dollar."

"And that is why you call your gold pieces sovereigns, I suppose," she rejoined, which being a plain, unvarnished jest, pleased Wensdale greatly.

"Alida has so much social talent," whispered Mrs. Norris to May, when the visitor had bowed himself out. "The charm of perfect breeding, I should call it."

"It isn't," said her daughter, sullenly; "it is only thinking of things to say in time."

The Brisbanes were waiting for their carriage near the Thirty-eighth Street door, across the lobby from where Mrs. Norris herded her flocks while her scouts deployed without. Bessie held up a fan in token of good faith, but the presence of the former friend deterred her from further demonstration, and Mrs. Brisbane had developed symptoms of oppression.

B. J. at first was nowhere to be seen, but presently he appeared, and catching sight of Alida, made his way toward her. He wore the fur-lined overcoat, dear as the dollar mark to the hearts of cartoonists, and Mrs. Norris, observing him to be the target of all eyes, experienced a new satisfaction in the presence of Miss Van Wandeleer.

"I've got a bottle on the ice for somebody," Brisbane said, in metaphor, as he took Alida's hand. He spoke low, as was his habit when in public, and with the air of saying something of importance—another habit.

"For me?" inquired Alida, guiltily.

"Rather!" he answered, laughing; "but it will keep. How did you like the show?"

Alida expressed approval of the show, and asked if Bessie had enjoyed it.

"Oh, thoroughly," said Bessie's father, "in spite of not being able to rewrite the play and take the leading rôle herself."

They made a striking vignette of Manhattan, the tall man of the hour in his marvellous fur coat, and the pretty Miss Van Wandeleer in her fluffy wraps and slightly lifted skirt; a picture many stopped to look at, and which lost nothing in effect when Mr. Love, in bear-skin collar, pushed through the crowd leading a district telegraph boy, somewhat dazed by his environment.

"I am going to open this dispatch, my dear Princess," announced B. J., carelessly, "and in order to mystify the populace, I shall show it to you. Please appear amused whatever it may be. The play's the thing!"

As he spoke he tore open the envelope, barely glanced at the yellow paper within, and handed it to Alida, who, laughing obediently, read:

"'Brig Mary Ann unloading at Commercial wharf.'"

"You did not know that I had shipping interests," he said.

"No," answered Alida, outwardly keeping up the comedy; "but I do understand something of this. Bessie and I came in, you know, while you were dictating a letter on New Year's Day."

"True," assented Mr. Brisbane; "I rely on your discretion," and still smiling he went to join his party.

"I have never seen the great B. J. so close at hand before," said Mrs. Norris, as they left the theater. "What an interesting face he has." The Norrises had been of those who held aloof from the Park Avenue family when first their star shone in the ascendant, but, remembering the Roman matron, she was ever ready to admit mistakes, and make amendment when occasion served. "Is it true they are about to send out cards for a cotillion?"

Mrs. Norris, who had set her heart upon a large, round table in comparative seclusion, was not pleased to discover that her husband had effected an exchange for another in the middle of the restaurant.

"Nick, that was exactly what I might have expected," was all she said, but the words were in intent profane.

"That's the worst of having married people in a party," whispered Johnny Alexander to Alida. "They are sure to fight. Miss Van Wandeleer, let's call our engagement off."

"For the cotillion?"

"No, for life. Oh, I had forgotten I did not propose; I meant to do so in the last intermission. I wonder if it could have been to some other girl."

At supper it appeared that Mr. Norris, aided by the Hoodoo, had at the late hour added to the bill of fare some certain dishes which took long in preparation. It was for the hostess another expiation, though no one else found reason to complain if, when they rose at last, most of the other tables were deserted. But it was not until they were all in the lobby once more, differentiating wraps, and preparing for the homeward journey, that the real potentiality of the Norris Hoodoo became apparent.

"Lord, Nancy!" gasped Mr. Norris, entering from the avenue, pale and tremulous, "the auto's busted!"

"Oh, Nick!" cried Mrs. Norris, softened by the presence of actual calamity, "can't it go?"

"No," said her husband, with finality, "it's anchored out there like an owl lunch wagon."

"Hansoms!" suggested Johnny Alexander, drawing nearer to Alida.

"Impossible!"

"Telephone!" suggested some one else.

"Too late!"

"Charter a Fifth Avenue stage!"

"Stopped running!"

As Miss Van Wandeleer, who had no suggestions to offer, stood a little apart from the group, now agitated with a pleasurable excitement, she heard a voice beside her.

"Alida!"

"Anthony!" she cried, forgetting to prefix cousin in her surprise.

He had just come into the hotel, and perhaps knew more of the stranded vehicle than she. At all events it did not appear necessary to explain. Knowing of the calamity, the bevy of half-frightened girls explained itself.

"So you are one of them," he said, with less concern than civility demanded, and turning to a bell-boy, he added, "Go out and tell my man to wait."

He wore his gray coat, just as she had seen him on the evening of their first meeting when he had come in from the sleet to Mrs. Ruggles's parlor, and when, oddly, she had seemed to know him better than in the short afternoon of their relationship.

"You have a gift for sudden appearances," she said.

"And you a gift for getting into trouble," he replied.

"It's not my fault," she protested; "it's the Norris Hoodoo."

"We have decided on hansoms after all," said Mrs. Norris, coming up. "Nick is outside now collecting seven."

It simplified the situation somewhat that Miss Van Wandeleer should so opportunely externalize at once a cousin and a cab, and Mrs. Norris breathed to May, "Alida's tact is really wonderful!"

A minute later the tactful one was rolling rapidly southward in the corner of a brougham, a spacious brougham whose satin lining she could feel, and whose superficial luxuries every passing light revealed; a clock, a hand glass, a silver rack of many small conveniences.

"I am afraid we have taken some one's carriage by mistake," she said. "This is like Bessie's, only better. I never saw such a lot of modern improvements."

"Oh, that is not all," he answered, laughing. "It has steam heat and electric lights," and with a button he created an illumination just long enough to establish its possibility.

Already old Delmonico's was on their right, and to the left Farragut in bronze, with Madison Square dark and shadowy beyond. Some day

she would tell him of St. Martin, some day when they had more time.

"I want to hear of your trip to Wilmington," she said. "Did you find Dr. Groesbeck?"

"Oh, yes," he answered, leaning back; "I saw him, good old man, and he told me everything there was to tell. He married my father and mother, and my aunt, who had set her heart upon my father marrying another girl she liked better, appears to have made herself a meddlesome old nuisance all around. It was a desolate half-elopement that nobody cared much about, and the family quarrel might or might not have been patched up later. I will tell you all about it some other time, but somehow I cannot yet connect the story with myself. I cannot even feel any great concern in it. Do you think it strange and unnatural in me to feel no more sympathy for my poor parents, who died twenty-five years ago, than if I had only read of them in a book?"

"No," said Alida, "but I am sure most people would pretend to have more sentiment."

"Oh, I am going to try," he went on; "I shall find out all the places where they walked, and all the things existing now that they once saw, and I shall read the old tales and the old poetry they read till I know something of how they talked and thought. And I shall find old pictures to

show how they dressed. Then perhaps I can bring them back, and—it will be different."

Broadway flashed suddenly across their path; Broadway, the irresponsible defier of order, cleaving the granite city where it will—Broadway, Mother of Lights.

"I am sure it will be different," said Alida, softly, "and may I help?"

"Yes, you can lend a hand," he said.

They entered now a zone of quiet, where great, deserted buildings slept, and only the street lamps shone in, first from the right and then from the left.

"You have not forgotten to-morrow?" he said.

She shook her head for answer, leaning forward with her face turned to the carriage window. In five minutes more she would be at home.

"Were you surprised to see me at the Holland House?" she asked, when a dozen alternating lights had passed.

"No," he replied, "you might have come to meet me."

"How absurd!" she said, still looking from the window.

There were cabs in front of the French restaurant, and within the music was still playing—playing a Hungarian waltz.

Alida wiped the moisture of her breath from the glass with her handkerchief.

"I heard some one say something very nice about you this evening at the theater," she said; "but I am not at all sure that you deserve it."

She heard him laugh a little in his corner before he responded, "Please tell me who it was."

"Lord Wensdale."

"Oh, Wenny, old chap!" he answered, quoting Howlet. "Yes, he has invited me to visit him in Devonshire next fall."

"Shall you go?"

"I'll tell you that to-morrow."

"Thank you, Cousin Anthony."

Fourteenth Street just ahead with a shabby little horse car trotting eastward empty and aimless.

"I'm not your Cousin Anthony!"

"Oh, are you not? Who are you then?"

"I will tell you to-morrow."

Cheap carpets in a lighted window, forty-nine cents the yard for blue or brown or striped.

"You are keeping everything for to-morrow," said Alida, "while I have changed my mind about going to Trinity at all."

Again in his corner Anthony laughed. "To-night don't count for anything," he said, mysteriously; "it's just a sort of extra dividend."

"I don't know anything about dividends," she asserted, "except that Englishmen like them."

"For which may heaven be blessed," said Anthony.

It was a different home-coming from that of the yellow sleigh. Almost as different as though the story had been reversed to permit the pumpkin to become a coach and six. The footman who opened the carriage door was even slimmer and neater than Mr. Love, the back upon the box straighter than that of Moneypenny. There was a light in the hall where Mary stood expecting her, and the stair carpet shone cheerfully red.

"Stop just a minute, please," said Anthony, "and tell me what you think of the carriage."

"It is beautiful," she said.

"As fine as Bessie Brisbane's?"

"Yes, ever so much nicer. Whose is it?"

"If you are very good, and don't keep people waiting," he replied, "I will tell you all about it, perhaps—to-morrow."

She turned and left him, running up the steps without so much as a good night. What was this wonderful to-morrow to be, when so much would be made clear?

CHAPTER XX

THE GENEROSITY *OF* ANTHONY

"Cousin Caroline, may I come in?" inquired Alida through the door of Miss De Wint's apartment, and from within the echo cried, "Come in."

The hour being half past seven in the morning, Alida was not unprepared to find the room in something less than its accustomed order. Cousin Caroline's cabinet, obligingly upon all fours as it were, became at night a bed, and in this bed was now Miss Caroline herself, so much of her as was visible above a smooth and spotless counterpane, clad in a red flannel sack of many scallops, within her hands a copy of Thomas à Kempis in large type. Only a pair of worsted slippers at the bedside suggested that Cousin Caroline ever intended to get up.

"Good gracious me! what time is it?" she demanded, viewing the finished aspect of her godchild's toilet with alarm.

"Oh, not nearly eight yet," replied the other, reassuringly.

"Then what is the matter?" Miss Van Wandeleer was not always dressed at eight.

"Oh, nothing; I only woke rather early, and thought you might like to have a call from me."

"Of course, my dear," affectionately; "sit down."

As Alida encamped in the vicinity of a miniature Mont Blanc, composed in part of Cousin Caroline's extremities, she said, "I want to ask some questions, and I don't want to be snubbed."

"Snubbed?" repeated Miss De Wint, as though the word were unfamiliar.

"Well, put off," went on Alida, coming at once to her purpose, for her sponsor could not be counted upon to remain long in her present position. "You see I cannot help hearing people speak occasionally of things that happened in our family that I have never been told about."

"What sort of things?"

"Well, for instance, I never knew till a little while ago that you ever had a brother who would have been my Cousin Anthony."

As Alida spoke of Cousin Anthony it seemed that she had been cheated of a hallowed memory, and Miss De Wint, who had been keeping her place in à Kempis with her forefinger, closed the volume and laid it upon the coverlet; perhaps the softening influence of her reading was apparent in her answer.

"I did not suppose there was anything that you had not picked up in one way or another by

this time, Alida," she replied. "There is no secret about my brother Anthony. I do not like to speak of him, that is all. There was an estrangement and he died years ago, far away and among strangers."

"Was not his wife with him?"

"Yes, she was there."

"But you did not like her?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Mont Blanc showed symptoms of collapse.

"My dear," said Miss De Wint, "it is a long story. She was no match for him, and if she had been, he was scarcely twenty-one. Of course I was not pleased with the marriage."

"I don't call that a long story," ventured the questioner, boldly, "and you could not have been estranged from him just because he married a girl he cared for."

Miss Caroline raised herself a little on the pillows.

"I was not estranged from him," she said; "he was estranged from me. I shall tell you how it happened, now, Alida, and then we need never speak of it again."

Alida nodded her agreement to the bargain.

"You must understand," went on her godmother, "when father died he left everything—there was not much—to me, being a woman and

the eldest, expecting me of course to divide with Anthony as long as he might need it. But I always considered the half to be his by right, and there never would have been a question between us if he had not insisted upon getting married."

"And you did not think the half his by right after that?" Alida asked.

"Don't jump at conclusions!" admonished Miss De Wint, severely; "I was not going to help him to make a fool of himself, so I simply put the money aside for him till he got back his senses. He had something of his own, for when he graduated from the School of Mines, they kept him in the laboratory and he would have been a professor at Columbia now; but he just dropped everything and ruined his career to run off to a frightful place in the West, where her father actually kept cows—cows, my dear! There Anthony died and she died, and I suppose their child has been brought up a milkman!"

"Oh, there was a child?"

"Of course there was a child," said Miss De Wint. "Did you ever hear of an unsuitable marriage where there was not a child?"

"And do you know nothing of your nephew?" asked Alida.

"My nephew!" snorted Cousin Caroline. "If he ever wants anything of me, he will find me out, and if he never does he won't thank me for

finding him out. But if he should turn up, I am prepared for him."

"Prepared for him?"

"Yes, my dear. I have never considered more than half the money mine, so every quarter when I get my check from the Guardian and Trustee, I put Anthony's share aside."

"And have you been doing so all these years?"

"Yes, I have never failed."

"Oh, Cousin Caroline!" cried Alida, deeply touched. "And you have never used a bit of it?"

"Pshaw, my dear!" retorted Miss De Wint; "don't take me for a fool, Alida. My brother was a gentleman, not a miser, and I have managed his income as he would have done himself."

"Oh!" said Alida, mystified, and Miss De Wint went on, "Yes, I have acted as I believe he would have wished. Of course, after his death, there being no living expenses to provide for, Anthony was able to afford many little expenditures that I could never dream of."

"Yes, I suppose so," assented Alida, more because her godmother looked sharply toward her than because she really understood, and Miss De Wint explained, "There were charities, you see, in which I knew he would have been interested, and Christmas presents to people he would have liked, and things of that sort. He was a

generous, open-handed boy, and knowing his tastes so well, I could tell exactly what his wishes would have been."

"Do you mean that you made the presents for him?" Alida inquired, with more wonder than she thought best to show.

"Yes, my dear, and I am glad that you have brought the subject up. You will now understand that I am not so recklessly extravagant as you have accused me of being at times."

"But I only said that once, Cousin Caroline, about my watch," Alida protested. "It was so much too handsome."

"I hesitated a long time over the watch," admitted Miss De Wint, "but I could fancy Anthony saying, 'Pshaw, Caroline, go to Tiffany's and get the child a good one,' and he could well afford it. Stay where you are, Alida, I don't want any false sentiment. If I have given you little things from time to time on your Cousin Anthony's behalf, I have never allowed myself to want for what my brother could give me—it would have been unfair to him. And when Anthony's son turns up, as he will some day, without a penny in his pockets, there will always be enough to keep him from the poorhouse without expense to me."

"That is very fortunate," agreed Alida, without false sentiment. "But suppose he should

come here not wanting anything at all, but to be friendly, and join the family?"

"I should receive him well, I hope, and let him see, as kindly as I could, that it would be much better for every one if he went back to his dairy."

Miss De Wint, stretching out her arm, laid Thomas à Kempis on a nearby table, while her eyes were allowed to rest suggestively upon the worsted slippers at the bedside.

"I know you want to get up," Alida said, "but you must first let me ask one more question: what would you do if your nephew should prove tall and handsome and well educated and not poor, and brave and generous and noble?"

"Pshaw!" sniffed Cousin Caroline, regarding the slippers with increasing interest, "in that case, I should marry him to you."

"Then I should get the Tankard and the Spoon!"

"Yes; now run along to breakfast."

They were a close-mouthed lot, the De Wints, as Dutch as Edam cheese, and when Peterus the Miller had cast his vote for what should be the emblem of his city, it had not been for the lion who can fight, nor for the eagle who can fly, but for the beaver who builds his house impregnable and keeps its one door hidden.

In the lower hall Edward Volkert, who breakfasted early and alone, was putting on his over-

coat with unnecessary contortions while Bell stood watching the operation.

"I contemplate getting a new coat to-day," he was saying. "How do you think a long fur one would suit me? They only cost five hundred."

"You would certainly be taken for an actor," put in Alida, and Volkert, with a final wrench, replied: "Yes, or a Brisbane—the difference is in the price of admission. Glory! there goes a button! B. J. and I are going to close out the Transcontinental deal to-day, and this evening there will be fireworks on the lawn."

"You might better be thinking of your own business," said Alida.

"I am," protested Volkert, buttoning his coat. "Be brief, this is my busy day! 'And the party of the first part, for and in consideration of the payment and emoluments hereinafter specified, hereby covenants and agrees—' " and so reciting Volkert departed, closing the door behind him.

"I am afraid he is getting more impractical every day," lamented Bell.

"He is certainly getting more tiresome," said Alida. "What are you going to do this morning, Bell? Look at flats?"

Bell laughed and shook her head.

"No; no more flats," she said, mysteriously.

"Why not?" demanded the other, with a note of disappointment, for flat hunting is a pastime

like another when one has an hour or two to spare.

"Don't ask me," pleaded Bell, adding, with nervous haste, "Alida, I almost believe the tide has turned. But please do not let me say another word," and Bella Junior rapped with her knuckles on the wooden newel post as a charm to avert the evil consequences of over-confidence.

In the dining-room little Mr. Ruggles, reading the morning paper, chuckled to himself.

"What is it, father?" Bell inquired, and her father, who was not one to keep his chuckles to himself, explained: "Sly old fox, is Uncle Horace; regular old sphinx I call him! Just hear this, 'Uncle Horace's Little Joke. In reply to a direct question concerning his reiterated assertion that the Big B. had not been sold, the Sage of Cedar Street replied, My words were that the road could not be bought.' See the point, my dears? The road had been sold already! A quibble, I call it; just a quibble."

"How very sly!" said Bell, appreciatively, and Alida felt quite safe in agreeing that Uncle Horace had been sly.

"Mark my words," went on Mr. Ruggles, "that meeting this afternoon will be of vast importance. All Brisbane has to do now is to sign the biggest check that ever passed the clearing house."

"Why, father, do you really think so?" inquired Bell, in a tone implying that B. J. should be notified at once of this simple solution of the case.

"Think so?" returned Mr. Ruggles, uncovering a dish; "why, bless my soul, I have seen it all along; besides, it's right here in the paper."

CHAPTER XXI

AT THE TOMB *OF A* BISHOP

She found him in the nave with his back to the closed bronze doors, looking toward the chancel where the white altar stood in shadow beneath the great west window. He saw her immediately as she came in by the southern porch, and without moving beckoned her to come to him. As she stood beside him in silence for a moment, she knew this to be his way of reminding her of New Year's Eve, when they had met in the snow.

"It was better with the candles, wasn't it?" he said at length, and Alida answered: "Yes, it was better then."

"I wish they would light them again," continued Anthony, reflectively; "I wonder if they would if we were to make it an object to them."

"What an absurd idea!" rejoined Alida. "Of course they would not." But he did not appear to be convinced.

"I believe they would," he insisted, obstinately. "Some day let us see if they will not light every candle there—just for you and me."

He had taken her fingers in his—her hand chanced to hang very near, but Alida drew them

hurriedly away and moved a few steps from him. Her breath grew short, and for the moment she could not have spoken had she tried. There was no doubt of his meaning—there had never been a doubt—only now she could no longer cheat herself into the belief that there was a doubt. But as she took the nearest seat of a long pew it was with a feeling of flat finality, as though something that should have gone on forever had come abruptly to an end.

She had always known that somewhere in the path would be a gate she should open with her own hand and pass through willingly. But now, when a sudden turn had brought her to it, the old way, the primrose way, seemed sunnier looking back than she had sometimes thought it, and the country on ahead seemed tamer, and the distance gray. There Certainty, with her little bunch of keys, stood waiting to let her in, and Chance, the merry, motley fool, to say good by. Soon he would be capering for some one else, but there were tears in his eyes, for he and Miss Van Wandeleer had been good friends. Faintly overhead the bells of Trinity tolled off another quarter hour, the last, the very last. It was like being born again, it was like dying and waking up in heaven to find the dear old earth rags gone.

Alida was grateful to him that he did not speak to her, but she was glad, when he took the seat

behind, to feel that he was near, for she was sure he understood her now as he had always understood. Presently she, too, understood. Presently, in the silence that was as a sacrament between them, she saw that, knowing she would stay, he had left her free to go. She felt that he was speaking to her with his heart, drawing her to him with his will, kissing her with his eyes, and yet should she choose to leave him he would not put out a hand to hold her back. From the first he had taken everything for granted, her good will, her friendship, her loyalty; now, though she had surrendered nothing, there was nothing left to give. Nobody else she had ever known would have chosen an empty church for a moment such as this would be to both of them forever. Nobody else would have allowed her at such a time to sit and think with her hands in her muff. Still, as she sat, there came a gradual realization that he held her above the women whose surrender is half music and moonlight, whose new born love is cradled with the sickly twin, regret.

That he believed her capable of understanding this brought to Alida a revelation of herself. Dimly at first she saw herself as some one who had never existed before. And he, too, would be thenceforward some one else. They would be new people on the earth, like those two in the

garden for whom all things were created. It was for both an end and a beginning, the eternal miracle of the old perpetual beginning. Some day there would be lighted candles and music and flowers, and every one would know, and a date would be written in the register, but it would not be the right date.

When Alida rose composedly and turned to face him, his elbows were on the back of the pew, and he was looking up at her with the old look of good companionship which she had never shrunk from meeting.

"You promised to show me the church," was all he said.

"You don't deserve it," she replied, and prompted by something in her voice that had not been there before, he reached over and took her hand and raised the small, gray fingers to his lips.

"I know that very well," he said, "but fortunately it is the undeserving who get everything."

"Then come," rejoined Alida, laughing, as she stepped into the aisle, "I shall not let you miss a tombstone."

A passing verger, hearing the laugh, looked at them reproachfully. He had before encountered purblind sightseers in Trinity, but as he paused to adjust a cushion his manner was in itself a hint.

"It never seems wicked to talk in a big church,"

Alida whispered. "After all a church is just God's dressing-room, and I look forward to a lovely time in heaven."

"And so do I," said Anthony, "but not just yet."

There is not much to be seen in Trinity, less perhaps than in any edifice on earth of like celebrity, but the dim aisles of the old, brown, overshadowed church are pleasant places when one is in the mood for loitering.

"We have an ancestor or two in the churchyard," Alida began, half apologetic in her rôle of showman; "but I don't know exactly where they are, and I am not quite certain about their names."

"I am glad of that," said Anthony, "for now I can picture them each as being 'for forty years a warden of this parish,' whereas they might turn out just common vestrymen."

"I don't care much about this Trinity lot," Alida responded, loftily, "they were collaterals anyway, and only seventeen hundred and something. You will hear about the best ones from Cousin Caroline, the one who brought the news of the burning of Schenectady across the snow, and the other who disapproved of giving up New Amsterdam to the British, and entrenched himself in Harlem with a handful of followers."

"Did he make a good fight?"

"No, but that was because they either did not know he was entrenched or did not care. They never pursued him. He is buried in St. Mark's. Some day I'll take you there."

They were moving slowly through the southern aisle, where the strong light fell upon her face lifted to his, saying "I'll take you there," as though there were no question now of all days being theirs.

"Alida," he said, stopping her, "do you remember when I heard you say that first, 'some day together, hand in hand'?"

"Yes," she said, softly, looking down; "but it was not meant for you then."

"I thought it was," he answered. "I knew it was."

"But you had only seen the back of my head."

"And you had not seen me at all, and yet you were singing to me all the while, were you not?"

"Perhaps," she answered; "I don't know."

"Tell me some more about ancestors," he said, laughing, as they moved on again, and he was not the first who had taken pleasure in Alida's narratives, irrespective of their purport.

"I don't know any more about the De Wints," she said, "and the Van Wandeleers would not interest you."

"And when have I shown a lack of interest in Van Wandeleers?" he asked, reproachfully.

"Then I shall tell you of my favorite who was a Justice of the Peace. He does not appear to have had a first name, and Cousin Caroline hates him because he was here in 1647, three years before there was a De Wint in the colony. When two people sued each other he always appointed some one to reconcile them, and if they refused to be reconciled he fined them each so many beavers that he grew enormously rich for those simple days, and bought acres and acres of land on Broadway."

"Which he sold again for other beavers," added Anthony. "He must have been a man of great intelligence as well as a practical politician."

"You need not try to disparage him," said Alida, "for I revere him highly. He married his own widow."

"That was rather clever, I admit. How did he manage it?"

"Oh, just by being captured by the Indians and allowing himself to be thought dead till his wife married again, and the second husband fell into a well. Then he came back and they had another wedding—all within a year."

"I don't wonder you are proud of such an enterprising forefather."

"Of course," she admitted, "it would not be much if it happened now, but being in 1649 makes us quite historical."

"Somehow," said Anthony, reflectively, "I can't feel great enthusiasm for that widow."

"Nor I," confessed Alida, laughing. "But then we don't know all the circumstances."

"Yes, the beavers may have been a complication. I wonder what became of them."

"Oh, I suppose the moths got into them, or he invested them badly. As a family, we have none of us been able to keep our beavers when we had them; it did not seem to make so much difference, being poor, when mother was a girl, but now you know it makes a great difference."

"I don't believe it would to you," he said, and she answered, quickly, "Oh, I was not thinking of myself, I am used to being poor, I like it." But as the avowal afforded him open amusement, she went on, "I suppose I should not call it poverty, for I have always had everything I could possibly want, even since the Guardian and Trustee has cut our income down nearly one half. Did you ever hear of the Guardian and Trustee?"

"Oh, yes, as a leading financial institution, I know it very well."

"You can't unless they take care of your property and give you two per cent," she answered, sadly. "I should never have had anything pretty if it had not been for—" she hesitated a moment, and as an interesting coincidence occurred to her, ended—"if it had not been for you."

"For me?"

"Yes," she said, laughing; "it sounds improbable I know, but it is true. Now let us go and look at the Bishop! I have forgotten exactly where they keep him."

"Is he in a cage?"

"No, in a sort of pen."

He was not permitted a close examination of the reredos, as Alida, holding such curiosity profane, led the way across the church to a narrow doorway in the western wall. And when they passed through into the room where the good Bishop lies in sculptured effigy, they found him quite alone behind the iron railing, his eyes discreetly skyward.

The apartment is a small one, and the narrow door into the church but little used. And the statue, which is well thought of as a work of art, repays five minutes passed before it—or even ten.

"I did not see the Bishop at all, did you?" said Anthony, when they were in the church once more.

"No," said Alida, straightening her veil, "you would not let me."

She walked so rapidly that a row of little doors might have been passed unnoticed, and when he protested against the pace, she expressed concern at being late for lunch.

"But I have no idea of being shaken off so

soon," he announced, quickening his step to come beside her; "besides there is something rather important I think you ought to know."

"You may tell it to me another time," she said, suspecting insincerity, "perhaps day after to-morrow."

"It will be too late then," he answered, with a note of pathos that would have made a harder heart than hers relent.

"I did not think you were in earnest," she began, repentantly; "of course I want to hear."

"Then listen," he went on; "I am awfully hungry."

"Is that all?"

"No, only the beginning; the rest will be in French."

They stood beneath the shadow of the porch a moment to watch the mid-day movement of Broadway, while eyes and ears became adjusted to the sudden burst of light and noise. It was the time of relaxation and refreshment, though a stranger might not have guessed it, a time of cigarettes and apples, of nose bags and *plats des jours*, from Delmonico of the past, smiling many headed across fifty tables, to Delmonico of the future, dispensing hot waffles from a barrow. Every one was thinking, among other things, of lunch, those who were not to lunch perhaps hard-

est of all. But his luck was bad, indeed, who could not at least contribute a banana to the atmosphere of nutriment.

It was one o'clock, and before the single stroke a bar of sweet old music came to the senses like a whiff of hay. The sky between the granite cliffs was blue as aniline, the steam clouds white; the flags stood straight out from the west. Above and through the hurry of the street one felt the stir of wider movements on river and bay and sea, of barge and brig, lighter and liner, trader and tramp, red rust upon the bow, white salt upon the stack, bearing the tributes to the tithing house. It was impossible to resist the impulse of it. It was impossible to stand still.

"I think," said Alida, looking about her, "that after all I should like to be a gold bug."

"Why don't you say an octopus at once?" inquired Anthony.

"Because that would be too ambitious. I should be satisfied as just an ordinary gold bug, running in and out of banks, and climbing over heaps and heaps of money just for the sake of touching it."

Through the railing a lean man looked at them like a wild thing from a cage. He had a tray in his hand, and discerning something in them to inspire confidence, he held up a card of collar buttons.

"Three cents apiece, two for five," he said, mechanically, but more by way of salutation than in hope of trade.

"Come in here; you are just the man I am looking for," called Anthony, and as the lean man shuffled through the gate, he added, "I am not in need of collar buttons, but I should like an automobile."

"Ah, go chase yourself!" replied the lean man, sullenly, perceiving, as he thought, an ill-timed jest. But he brightened when it was made clear that he was wanted to go to Broad Street for a cab.

"Here is a quarter in token of good faith," said Anthony.

"All right," the man responded, depositing his tray in a corner, "and this here is my collateral. That's business, ain't it?"

"Excellent, but what is to prevent our running off with the securities?"

"You will get stuck bad if you do," replied the merchant, grinning. "You couldn't sell a button to-day if there was a scrip dividend with every one."

"Why not?"

"Oh, nothing, just the market's off. I never see buttons flatter. I missed it not going into rubber pigs, they're on the jump."

"Indeed they are," put in Alida, who took an

interest in the curbstone market. "I thought at first they must be frogs."

"That's right," agreed the vendor, turning to her. "I guess the folks that buys 'em never seen a pig. It's just a boom, that's all it is; but there's a puzzle coming out to-morrow that's going to knock 'em silly; I've got a tip."

"I suppose you are in on that," suggested Anthony, but the lean man shook his head.

"Naw," he replied, "I haven't got the margin."

"That's too bad," said Anthony, and the other shuffled off to get the cab.

Alida became thoughtful when the man had gone upon his errand. Once or twice she seemed about to say something that was to cost an effort, but what she did say finally, was: "I take back all I said about being a gold bug, I'd rather be an Anarchist." Somehow, behind the lean face at the bars the granite banks had grown a trifle less attractive.

Presently the messenger came breathlessly back to say that the cab, delayed in Wall Street by temporary complication with a truck, would be along directly.

"Thank you," said Anthony; "and, by the way, here is something a lady left for you."

"That be hanged for a yarn," replied the seller of buttons, and perceiving his hand to contain a

respectable margin for one who would speculate in puzzles, he asked, in bewilderment, "Say, boss, what is it you want me to do for this?"

"Climb out of the hole you are in, pardner," said Anthony, laying a hand upon the shabby shoulder. "Climb out and stay out."

Before they mounted to the automobile, Alida turned for a last look at the lean speculator.

"I really believe," she said to Anthony, "that he is giving all his collar buttons to the shoelace man."

"That is just because he is poor himself," said Anthony. "And yet you want to do away with poverty and be an Anarchist."

"I don't," replied Alida, "I want to be whatever you are."

CHAPTER XXII

THE MARKET CLOSES STRONG

Beside a window in an upper room they found a waiter rearranging a table which had just been vacated.

"Is this for any one in particular?" asked Anthony.

"For monsieur and madame," replied the Frenchman, in the spirit of diplomacy, at the same time drawing back a chair.

Alida took off her gloves and laid them by the water bottle together with her pocket-book containing eighteen cents. There was an odd sensation of domesticity in facing Anthony across a table with bread and salt between them that brought a becoming flush to her cheeks, and her eyes were bright with a child's elation in a treat.

"I am so glad you invited me," she said; "it is just wrong enough to be nice."

Anthony waved a bill of fare aside, protesting that they were there for lunch and not to go to market.

"Perfectly," replied the waiter, who was a person of discernment. "In that case monsieur

and madame will doubtless begin with clear, green turtle consommé in cups?"

"Of course," said Anthony. "What then?"

"That shall be followed, perhaps, by an omelette demi soufflé with clams, which madame will find excellent. After this will come a partridge and salad, which with some strawberries, will be quite enough. The wine will be a demi of Yquem, and a little taste of something with the coffee if desired."

"That is not a lunch," said Anthony, in French, "it is a sonnet."

"Merely an epigram, monsieur," replied the waiter, modestly; "it is only for the dinner that one cries in poesy."

Alida smiled, but turned her head toward the window. The waiter's fancy was amusing, yet it told her something more. Some people made every one they met a little better, a little cleverer, a little happier for the meeting.

"I confess to feeling rather proud," said Anthony; "if I had been alone he would have given me chops and bottled stout. It is all your influence."

"Indeed it is not," she protested. "If I were alone I could have had nothing but chocolate ice cream."

It interested her to determine at which table she had lunched with the Brisbanes after the

visit to the Stock Exchange, and Anthony suggested that they send a scout in search of B. J., who might be somewhere in the building. To this Alida replied that Mr. Brisbane was not in the city, and the secret of the telegram having been left to her discretion, she divulged it in an undertone.

"Of course I should not have told any one else," she said, beginning to butter a fragment of bread, for her appetite was excellent, "because it was only by an accident that I knew its meaning."

"It was rather a risky piece of theatrical business," commented Anthony, "and some day I am afraid our friend B. J. will trust his luck too far."

"How do you mean?" she asked with interest.

"I do not think he should have left town today, and I suspect him of liking the idea of a secret expedition. Probably he will not be sorry to get back this afternoon on the nick of time for the meeting. He has a weakness for effective entrances."

"Yes, Bessie always says he cares less for money than for the fun of making it. I sent him back the check."

"And have you heard from him?"

"No, but he said last night he had 'a bottle

on the ice for me.' What do you think he meant?"

"That the money was still to your credit, I suppose," he answered, laughing. "We shall have to find a way for you to get even with B. J."

"That is not very likely," she replied; "I always thought the fable of the lion and the mouse a silly one."

"I thought it was a lion and a lamb."

"I don't mean that; I mean the one in which the lion is caught in a net and the mouse, to whom he has done an act of kindness, gnaws the string and lets him out."

"Good for the mouse! The moral is: never refuse a favor from a lion, for you can't tell how soon you may have it in your power to do him a greater one."

"That is not the moral at all!"

"Oh, yes, it is—from the mouse's standpoint."

After a diversion, caused by the appearance of the consommé, Alida said: "I do wish Mr. Jacob had done something for Bell's account and risk instead of mine."

"Are you very fond of Bell?" he asked.

Yes, Alida was very fond of Bell; they had known each other so long; they had been at school together, and her greatest temptation to keep her fortune had been the thought of dividing it with Bell.

"Let us wish something pleasant for her," suggested Anthony, "and who knows but it may come true?"

"I wish that Dr. Van Gaasbeck might find an opening somewhere away from New York, where no one has ever heard of Kenilworth Place. I wish them just money enough to make a start."

"That sounds to me a little mean for a wish," he said.

"But it is not at all, it is only what they would wish for themselves."

"Then let us go on to Miss Brisbane. What shall we give her?"

"I cannot think of anything she wants," replied Alida, "unless it is a castle in Devonshire."

"I'm afraid you are too late with that," he rejoined, laughing, "Lord Wensdale is ahead of you."

"Oh, what makes you think so?"

"A remark made by his lordship that if all went well he hoped his house would become a rendezvous for selected Americans, and from observation I should say all is going well."

"But they have known each other such a short time—only since New Year's Day!"

"Your argument is good, but not unanswerable," he said, whereat they both laughed merrily. And so they laughed again and again;

at everything and nothing; at themselves and at the waiter, and at that good old chef the Future, whose menu is inexhaustible—when one is young.

Once they were interested to observe a drama in pantomime at a nearby table, where four stout gentlemen lunched well. They had been studying the quartette as types, sublimating them into marionettes who ate for their amusement, which made the *dénoûment* doubly entertaining. Coffee had come, and the four chairs were pushed slightly back, when a young man glided deprecatingly into the room, glanced about, and making his way to the side of the portly host, said something in an undertone. Immediately there followed a rapid interchange of question and answer, and the four heads came together across the cups. Then all four gentlemen rose in haste and went out.

"Evidently something has gone wrong with our friends," said Anthony, and Alida suggested, hopefully: "Perhaps their cashier has run away to Canada. Would it not be fun if we should read an account of it in the papers?"

"More likely cotton has become strong," he speculated.

"Or iron weak," added Alida, who felt herself thoroughly commercial.

Meanwhile their waiter had taken a flyer on

his own account. From heaven knows where he had produced a rose, large, red, and dewy.

"It is as madame pleases," he said, respectfully, as he laid his tribute before Alida, "but perhaps—" and when the bill had been paid he showed no evidence of dissatisfaction with his venture.

Two men, descending with them in the elevator, engaged in heated conversation.

"It looks to me as if the whole thing were about to burst," said one, "and if it does, look out for splinters!"

"I don't believe it," said the other; "I never knew a man who took better care of himself than B. J. Brisbane. I'll bet a hat he is as well as either you or I this minute.

"I beg your pardon, sir," put in Anthony, as a man may when common interests are involved, "is Brisbane reported ill?"

"Yes," answered the pessimist, civilly, including Alida in his audience, "they say he had a stroke of some sort in his office at noon. They say that even Harris Fosdick had to come away without seeing him."

"That don't prove anything," rejoined the optimist, and Anthony remarked: "The story is likely to be untrue. Brisbane was probably not in his office at noon."

"How do you know?" demanded both at once.

"I don't know positively."

Upon the steps, as the elevator passengers went out together, the optimist encountering an acquaintance coming in, exclaimed: "Say, Brisbane is all right! I have just had it straight from the inside; he wasn't even in his office at noon."

"Sure? Where did you get it."

"I'm not at liberty to tell."

"But the Walseheimer crowd are pounding things on 'Change!"

"Never mind, my tip is dead right!"

"Come," whispered Anthony, "we are becoming information bureaus."

"I never heard such a story-teller in my life," Alida said, indignantly, as they stepped out on the asphalt of Beaver Street to avoid the gathering groups upon the narrow sidewalk. Meanwhile the automobile driver, catching sight of his fares, folded a newspaper and prepared for action.

As the clumsy vehicle wheeled, backed, paused, and darted forward, scattering foot passengers to right and left, the fares were compelled to take refuge on the broad steps of the Corn Exchange bank. When they had climbed into their seats late comers, supposing them to be the center of interest, pressed closer for a better view.

"What's the matter?" inquired a man who carried a cane.

"Nawthing," replied another with his hands in his pockets. On Delmonico's steps the pessimist still talked loudly, and twenty stopped to listen.

Then, from everywhere at once, there arose a clamor. From Broadway and from Bowling Green, from Broad Street and the far-off ferries came the chorus:

"Extra! Extra! Extra!"

Like dogs who wake each other in the night and spread the alarm from farm to farm, shrill voice and harsh voice took up the cry, baying it, yelping it, ringing the changes on it. From every corner came the flash of the white, damp sheets of the newspapers. One could almost smell the ink, and one purblind could read the print across the street:

"B. J. BRISBANE STRICKEN."

Extra! Extra! Extra! It was as though the box of Pandora had been newly opened.

"It is not true," said Alida, her eyes bright with excitement. "It can't be true!"

"Stop!" ordered Anthony, for the cab was upon its way up Broad Street in the old track of the yellow sleigh, and leaning out he bought a paper from a yelling boy, the *Evening Bonfire*, terror of octopi!

"B. J. BRISBANE STRICKEN."

The letters, a foot long, were in red, and suggested prudence to those nice in the matter of gloves, but neither Alida nor Anthony considered theirs as they held the page between them, and with their heads close together, read the meager text that justified the headline.

" 'A startling rumor is in circulation that B. J. Brisbane was taken violently ill in his office at fifteen minutes after twelve to-day while in the act of lighting a cigar.' "

"He does not smoke cigars!" exclaimed Alida.

"I'm sure he does not," assented Anthony.

" 'The attack is reported to be apoplexy, and is said to have followed a lighter stroke which took place early last evening.' "

"Oh, he was perfectly well then, or he would not have gone to the theater."

"There is not a word of truth in the whole story," asserted Anthony; "see what they say themselves."

" 'Both at Mr. Brisbane's office and at his residence the report is still strenuously denied, though the reasons given for his failure to show himself are far from convincing.' "

The remainder of the column was composed of words hurriedly thrown together into phrases. "Gigantic interests." "Failure of the Transcontinental Deal." "Disaster." "Panic." "Ruin!"

"Extra! Extra! All about B. J. Brisbane!"

"Extra! Extra! All about the Horrible Panic!"

"Extra! Extra! All about the Terrible Smash!"

"Go up as far as the Exchange," commanded Anthony, "and don't go too fast."

There was no visible commotion though the street was crowded, sidewalk and carriage way, and men bought papers eagerly. Office boys sent out for copies read the news themselves while hastening back. Brokers hurried from restaurants still chewing, and walking briskly. Windows were opened, cabs drew up, banana barrows sought safety. The street was trembling on the verge of a disaster—or a hoax.

"It's all a fake," one man said, confidently, though his face was set.

"That's right," another added; "the bears have had this up their sleeve all day."

"You see they don't believe it," cried Alida, leaning out across the door in her excitement.

"Extra! Extra! Extra!"

"It's a fake!" "It's a lie!" "I know it to be true!" "I've seen a private wire!" "I bet you two to one!" "Say, Brisbane's in his office!" "He's on 'Change." "I'll bet—" "You lie." Every minute the talk grew louder, every minute

the excitement grew, as by tens and scores the crowd increased.

In front of the Exchange the automobile stopped suddenly, to avoid collision with a hansom cab, which had turned in from Wall Street at a reckless pace. It almost seemed that the driver had wilfully risked disaster, and as the horse fell back upon its haunches he stood up, calling out reproaches with unnecessary violence.

"What do you think you've got there, anyway?" he asked, "a steam roller?"

Alida noticed his face to be red as that of a comic policeman on the stage, and fancied that he spoke with an eye to the audience in a manner distinctly histrionic. But presently, glancing at the occupants of the hansom, her interest in its driver ended. There were two men in the cab, one whom she was sure she did not know, although his dark features, beneath an aggressively shiny hat, were oddly familiar, and another whom Alida recognized with a thrill of triumph. He wore a heavy, fur-lined overcoat, and where his hat was pushed back from his forehead there hung the curl suggestive of a dollar mark.

"It is Mr. Brisbane himself!" she cried.

"Yes, B. J. sure enough!" said Anthony, scarcely less elated. "They can't catch that particular sort of weasel sleeping. By Jove, the fun has just begun!"

Then some one fairly yelled: "There's Brisbane!" and immediately the two vehicles became the center of a rapidly increasing throng. A hundred, two hundred, five hundred eager, breathing men, before the hundreds could be told off on the fingers.

The chief figure in the cab bent forward, smiling faintly, as though the commotion he had created amused him, and the driver, who appeared anxious to recover something he had dropped, made no effort to continue on his way.

"One hundred and ten for five hundred Big B."

"Sold!"

"One hundred and twelve for a thousand or any part!"

"Sold!"

"One hundred and fourteen—"

"Sold!"

"Oh, is it not exciting," cried Alida, leaning out across the doors; "did you ever see anything like it? But how pale he is!"

Meanwhile, the tumult in the Exchange became a pandemonium to make the walls reverberate. Excited members struggling to get in encountered others coming out. The curbstone brokers from the Mills Building ran in a body to join the fray. Men leaped into the air offering to buy or sell; they waved their arms and scribbled contracts on

their cuffs. Hats were knocked off and trampled under foot. From upper windows junior clerks made sky rockets with ticker tape.

The man with a dollar mark had sank back into the cab, his pale face growing paler every moment, but when some one shouted, "How is B. J. Brisbane?" he smiled again, and at the bellowed chorus, "He's all right!" he rose with an apparent effort, stepping forward as though intending to descend, stood irresolute for a moment, swayed, and caught the dash-board for support.

"By George, I don't half like it yet," said some one near the automobile. His collar, torn open, had evidently seen hard usage. "The Walseheimer clique are going short of the whole list."

"Let 'em sell! We'll make them sick before they're through with it."

"Do look at Mr. Brisbane!" cried Alida. "I'm sure he is not well! See, he can hardly stand."

"No, he is all right."

The man of the dollar mark drew himself erect, threw back one lapel of his great fur coat, and paused an instant in the act of stepping down. It almost seemed that he had come there to be seen, to confute his enemies, and wanted to make sure that everybody should recognize

him. Then with all eyes turned upon him, his features underwent a change, became distorted, twitched convulsively. His mouth fell open and grew set, his eyes began to roll, and falling forward he would have pitched headlong to the pavement had not the other in the cab leaned out to catch him. As he lay back rigid on the seat, his head jerked painfully toward one shoulder.

For a moment, for a score of heart beats, the silence of an overpowering horror fell, and breaking it the other man called in a voice that could be heard a block: "Drive to a doctor, and drive like hell! B. J. Brisbane is dying!"

Alida and Anthony were standing. They had thrown back the doors, and from the higher level of the platform could watch every movement of the stricken man within the hansom, every spasm, every jerk of the head.

"We will follow to the doctor's," he assured her; "we will do everything that can be done." But Alida, with her eyes fixed on the writhing figure, did not appear to hear. In her excitement she would have lost her foothold on the narrow ledge if he had not held her arm.

"Drive on," the dark man shouted louder than before. "Make way there, damn you all! Make way!"

Then something happened rather new on

'Change. A young lady in a neat gray tailor suit, poised on the pilot of an automobile, held up her muff as one who has authority.

"Don't let them go!" commanded Miss Van Wandeleer, forgetting everything else in the elation of a great discovery. "That is not Mr. Brisbane in the cab, that is an actor named Volkert! I tell you that is not Mr. Brisbane!"

Only a few of those nearest heard, but to more than one the mere suggestion meant financial life or death. What followed was like a whirlwind rising from the ground, and like a whirlwind it was over before the mind had time to realize it. Alida, from the corner where she shrank, saw a tidal wave of heads and shoulders press against the hansom. She saw the brown horse rear and plunge and Patrick Rooney, captain of the supes, lean out to strike him with a heavy stick. She saw Anthony with his hat off in the thick of it, holding back excited men until the blue arm of authority came to the relief, and Edward Volkert, divested of his furs, stood glaring tragic defiance across the shoulders of a cordon of police. From the Stock Exchange went up to heaven the mightiest bull yell ever known, for Alida had saved the Transcontinental deal.

"Go anywhere," panted Anthony, springing in beside her, "go anywhere you please, but stop at a hat store on the way."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LAST

There was in Mrs. Ruggles's establishment an unwritten ukase against newspapers at the breakfast-table. Nobody ever read them there, nobody ever thought of such a thing, except, of course, upon the morning after election. This rule remained in rigid force until half past nine, from which time breakfast, officially past, continued as a concession rather than a right. Then it was that little Mr. Ruggles unfolded his *Herald* with a knowing wink, for he still believed it rather rakish to affect the *Herald.* Then Miss Deusenbury and Miss Toll, who took the *Tribune* between them, announced every morning each in her turn a preference for the supplement. Then Mrs. Van Gaasbeck read the *Sun* with a satisfaction attributed more to that lady's nature than her paper. Grandma Epps, who never read anything, did not come to breakfast. Mrs. Van Wandeleer's taste inclined her to a paper that prints alone that which is fit for publication. Cousin Caroline boldly took the *Morning Journal.* "If I cannot afford to read what is going on," she said, "I should like to know who can?"

In politics, Miss De Wint was in open sympathy with an organization wherein her father and her grandfather had been sachems, and which had made her mother's uncle mayor. She had even been suspected of a cunningly worded request for intercessory prayer which had trapped the rector into a petition for the success of Tammany Hall. Thus it was that, on the morning following Alida's experience on 'Change, her godmother alone possessed a spirited representation of a young lady with pretty feet standing on the top of an automobile amid the plaudits of a multitude.

"'WHO WAS THE GIRL IN GRAY?'" she sniffed, in the words of a not inconspicuous headline, "'Supposed to be a well-known society belle,'" she quoted further, and added as of greater probability, "Supposed to be a hussy!"

"Hello, what's this!" cried little Mr. Ruggles. "By George, that Broad Street incident was true! Didn't believe it when I saw it in the papers last night, I didn't, on my word. I don't believe ever more than half of what the papers say," and this was true of Mr. Ruggles, but he commonly believed the wrong half.

"Some vulgar practical joke among the brokers," commented Mrs. Van Wandeleer, glancing languidly at her more conservative account. "I dislike such things extremely."

"The *Sun's* reports are always so delightful," murmured Mrs. Van Gaasbèck; "I read them for the English," and the doctor, looking over his mother's shoulder, put on his heavy glasses to get in touch with the conversation.

"Pretty good," he commented, laughing; "Mr. Volkert should have been there as an expert on fits; don't you think so, Miss Van Wandeleer?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Alida, reddening furiously. She would have given a good deal to have had a paper of her own. But nobody observed the blush. Even Miss Toll was reading what the king had worn, and Miss Deusenbury book reviews.

"By the way, where is the Volkert boy?" inquired Bella Senior, folding up a rather lengthy letter from a friend in Ceylon, and Bell, who at a side table, made market memoranda, suggested that he had probably overslept himself.

"It seems," announced Mr. Ruggles, as ever greatly interested in that which least concerned him, "that the lady was Miss Harriet Waterhouse Wotherspoon, a well-known writer."

"Of course," said Miss De Wint, with biting irony, "and as the well-known horse came round the corner he upset a barrow containing a number of well-known bananas, which a well-known newsboy immediately appropriated."

"To be sure; to be sure," chuckled Mr. Ruggles, with appreciation, and Miss De Wint went on to say, correctively: "The girl was a certain Tottie Twinkingham of the Alhambra, which accounts for her agility in climbing."

"Where did she climb?" Alida asked, but no one answered, and Mrs. Van Gaasbeck read: "'It is whispered that the attractive and self-possessed young person whose timely and effective appearance contributed so much to the enjoyment of the occasion, was not unconnected by ties of blood with a leading manager of spectacular finance. If this be so, her taste for situations is explained, and papa will hardly grudge the diamond necklace so conspicuously deserved.' Alida, my dear, that would seem to indicate your friend, Miss Brisbane, would it not?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Alida, "I am absolutely certain that it was not Bessie."

Mrs. Van Gaasbeck raised her eyebrows. "The paper would hardly go so far without excellent authority," she said, "and you know Western people do not see things just as we do."

"Miss Brisbane is a girl of perfect breeding," put in Cousin Caroline, springing to the rescue. "I should as soon suspect Alida herself." And Alida felt herself grow pale.

She had dressed with more than wonted atten-

tion to detail that morning, and had bestowed especial thought upon her hair, for this was to be a wonderful day. It was to be, after yesterday, the greatest day that ever dawned, and now the stupid papers threatened to spoil it all. She had done nothing that she was ashamed of, nothing that she would not do again. She did not care if every one in the world knew all about it, every one except her mother and her godmother and Mrs. Van Gaasbeck and a few others who did not understand her, and who accused her, without knowing it, of being acrobatic and Western and ill-bred. Somebody else had thought her brave and courageous, and even the horrid paper had called her attractive and self-possessed. Here no one had a word except in criticism. They even seemed to lack human sympathy for the Transcontinental deal.

Meanwhile the Broad Street ripple, having spent its strength upon the placid sands of Kenilworth Place, subsided. Little Mr. Ruggles bustled off declaring he would be late for an appointment, with Bell behind him to brush his shabby little hat. The doctor, nicely calculating seconds, was in the hall before the front door closed, and the doctor's mother did not follow until a full two minutes had gone by. The inevitable had met Mrs. Van Gaasbeck and was negotiating terms. Then everybody rose and

went their several ways, and the great day shouldered its pack like ever other day.

Alida did not leave the dining-room with the others, but lingered in the hope of seeing Edward Volkert, who supposedly, had overslept. She had dined out on the evening before—a nightmare dinner of commonplace decorum. She wanted now to make a bargain with him. It was distasteful to her, but it must be done if irrelevant matters were not to intrude themselves upon their betters.

As she waited, she took up an abandoned paper and read the exploits of The Girl in Gray, she of the pretty feet. It was a consolation to find the account so unlike what had happened, and the varied descriptions of herself which the reporter had been able to glean at second hand were most reassuringly inaccurate. With a little wisdom and a great deal of luck, confession might very well be put off until—well, until it made no difference. At first Alida found amusement in the paper, but further down the column her face grew suddenly serious. Such words as conspiracies, investigations, trials, occurred with frequency, and further on she saw a mention of sentences and Sing Sing. Not for the girl in gray, of course, everybody had such good words for the girl in gray that they might be half in love with her, but for one alluded to most often

as the poor tool who was, it seemed, predestined to vicarious suffering on the behalf of certain wicked persons who had not stopped at travesty of death to serve their base designs. These, it was prophesied, would go unpunished, unless a righteous public sentiment could be aroused against them, while the trembling, half-starved wretch—

Alida caught her breath. It had not before occurred to her that the simple exposure of a sham illness could entail serious consequences upon any one. Of course the papers, in their sensational way, were making too much of it. It was absurd to speak of such things as crimes, but it would be a relief to see Volkert, and a much greater one to see somebody who really knew.

At the sound of the front door opening and an approaching step upon the marble of the hall, Alida stopped reading and looked up. Before her stood the trembling wretch himself, the poor tool in his proper, though disheveled person, and assuredly he appeared to be half starved.

One glance would have been enough to satisfy the most unobserving that Edward Volkert had not overslept. No one with eyes so hollow could have slept at all. No one with raiment so disordered could have been recently in bed; that is, as being in bed is generally understood. His

face was grimy, his hair uncombed, his linen far below reproach, and he had the appearance of one who has been sprinkled with straw.

"Is breakfast over?" he inquired, in a voice suggesting bronchial troubles.

"Yes," replied Alida, regarding him with wonder, "long ago."

Edward Volkert made no comment on this piece of information; possibly the general aspect of the table had prepared him for it, but went at once to the pantry, where Alida heard him rattling among dishes. Presently, when he returned, he had compassed a sandwich constructed of two cold buckwheat cakes.

"What did you have for breakfast?" he inquired, somewhat wistfully.

Alida would have liked to ask several questions, but knowing that whatever Mr. Volkert had upon his mind would not remain long a secret, she restrained herself, and answered: "I don't remember; several things, fish and kidneys and something else."

"It tastes to me like mutton hash," replied the poor tool, taking another bite.

"Why don't you ring the bell?" Alida asked, throwing down the paper, and rising to perform an act of bare humanity.

"Don't!" cried Volkert, with his back against the bell, "I don't think Mary's heart could stand

the jar. I'm a pretty object, ain't I? Look as though I had been out all night, don't I?"

"You don't look very well," Alida admitted. "Have you really been out all night?"

"Worse than that," he answered, grinning, "I've been in all night, in the bull pen, in the cooler, in the Church Street station house."

"In the station house?"

"That's where," continued Volkert, openly gratified at Alida's expression of dismay; "you saw me nabbed."

"Why, yes," she said, with increasing concern, "but the last time they let you go in a few blocks—I thought they always did." Yet, in truth, Alida had not concerned herself greatly in the affairs of Edward Volkert.

"They don't always," he replied, laconically, and retired for a second sandwich like the first, and this time he secured some coffee, also cold.

"I am so sorry," said Alida, truly repentant for her selfishness, "But I never thought; if I had, I should have told Dr. Van Gaasbeck at once."

"I'm mighty glad you didn't," the criminal interrupted, speaking between bites; "Van Gaasbeck hasn't pull enough to work a grab bag. I had the slickest lawyer in the bunch. Big fat fellow with a diamond that would hypnotize a ghost. He called the cop a pachyderm in buttons, and showed the judge a book that said a

gentleman could have fits wherever he pleased. Then he talked about accidental resemblances, and said if people could be locked up for what they looked like, half of us would be in the zoo. He called my arrest an outrage on civilization, and demanded an ambulance, and almost cried to think how they had treated me, and how my distracted parents would feel about it."

"He must have been very clever," said Alida, "for of course you know you did behave outrageously. I don't believe you realize what trouble you might have made."

"Never mind that," Volkert interrupted, holding up a warning buckwheat crescent, "I haven't time just now for family prayers. The fact is, I'm only out now on a technicality, an oversight, that will be corrected as soon as the district attorney has had his bath. I've got to get across the river, in spite of a plain clothes man outside who is ready to bet I can't."

"A detective!" gasped Alida.

"He thinks he is."

"Oh, dear, what will you do?"

"I stopped at the drug store and telephoned for a Pennsylvania cab to take me to the Twenty-third Street ferry."

"That was a good idea."

"Yes, wasn't it? My foxy friend came in, too, to consult the directory, and heard every word.

He thinks me easy fruit. Would you mind watching at the front window while I run up for my bag, and nodding to the cabman when he comes? It's just as well he should not ring."

"Indeed, I will do everything I can," Alida assented, willingly.

When the cab arrived she followed her instructions, and shrank back behind the curtain to avoid the penetrating glances of an aggressively unobtrusive person sauntering past. Volkert came back almost immediately, a little cleaner than he had been, and if possible, more hollow-eyed. In his hand he carried a dilapidated satchel which he exhibited with satisfaction.

"It contains," he said, "three odd shoes, a tooth mug, and a broken concertina—my contribution to the Mulberry Street collection."

"I suppose you know what you are going to do," she ventured, doubtingly.

"You bet," he retorted, with confidence; "I am going to give that fellow out there the sad farewell, the gentle shake, somewhere between here and the ferry. Then I may swim the river, I may take ship for Staten Island and cross the Kill Von Kull; at any rate I'm due in Colorado as quick as I can make connections."

"Colorado?"

"Yes, I am going to begin again. I have the

needful, and a letter to a party who will make a man of me. I'm glad the contract is not mine. Good by! I haven't another soul on earth to say good by to."

"But your grandmother," Alida reminded him, "surely you are not going away without seeing her!"

"Grandma is asleep," he answered, doubtfully, then, as an impish fancy struck him, he darted to the red rep sofa, and catching up a cushion, molded it into the semblance of a human head, having a tidy for a night-cap. It might have been a bit of juggler's hypnotism, but in the dimly lighted room the effigy certainly did suggest Grandma Epps recumbent.

"Farewell, mine ancient mentor, my venerable guardian!" he murmured, stepping back a pace, and looking down upon the pillow, tenderly. "I go but to return, respected, famous, rich."

"Don't do it, Edward, I forbid it!" came the familiar tones of Grandma Epps, and Volkert, hurriedly recovering his satchel, held out a hand toward Alida.

"That's what it would have been," he told her, lightly; "that is all there has ever been between the old lady and me. Good by! I suppose you will be married long before I see you again. Good by!"

"Good by," replied Alida, warmly, and not

without emotion. She had not been a friend to Edward Volkert. She had often snubbed him and always disregarded him like the others of his world, and when she saw him in trouble she had gathered up her skirts and passed by on the other side. Now the pathos of this leave-taking gave her a pang not wholly undeserved. After all, was he not of the old stock, though swept aside and trodden under by the rush of newer life? Was he not of the blood that was her boast, and was not the disgrace he had brought upon it hers in part?

"Tell me how you ever came to do it," she cried, detaining him a moment; "tell me in a few words. I shall understand."

"They said it was to be a joke," he answered, flushing while his restless eyes grew fixed and intent on hers. "Pat Rooney had a bet—of course I would not take a cent of it—I did what I did—for art."

"Just one thing more," Alida interposed, "how did you—how did they know Mr. Brisbane was to be out of town?"

"That's telling."

"But you must tell me," she insisted.

"Oh, all right," he said, impatient to be off. "They sent B. J. a fake dispatch, some cipher that would be sure to fetch him. I had nothing to do with it. Now, are you satisfied?"

Alida had expected to learn of some trickery among the vulgar employees of the theater, some plot of prying footmen; she was not prepared for this.

"Satisfied?" she repeated, quietly, "no, Edward, I am not; there was but one person who could have betrayed that cipher, and that was his secretary."

"Serena?" demanded Volkert, blankly. He was an actor but this was not acting. "Why she is in Montreal. She takes the soubrette in the traveling 'Mr. Nobody,' and they open there to-night, so Rooney says."

"Rooney?"

"Yes, he is their advance. She is Serena Sandys now."

Alida stood a moment trying to collect her thoughts. And so Serena had achieved the bits of colored glass she called her jewels, leaving her father's name to be remembered in the Home for Gentlewomen. And before her Edward Volkert waited her permission to be gone, a fugitive. Was there to be none of them left? Was there no just man among them? No, not one?

"God knows what I should have done without your help, Alida," said Volkert, speaking solemnly, after a pause between them. But even as he spoke the words from his heart, he could not restrain a gesture of the arm, a clenching of

the fist accompanying them, an inflection in the voice which made them ring less true.

"Without me?" she asked him, in bewilderment.

"Yes, you or the man you are to marry. He would never have come to get me out if you had not sent him."

"Edward," she confessed, contritely, "I did not send him."

"Well, then, he came himself," he answered, with a laugh. "It's all the same. I'm glad you've such a fellow to look after you, Alida, and I'm mighty glad you are to have the forty million."

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

"Well, you have got more time to find out than I have to stand here talking. Good by, Alida, you're a brick! I'll send you back a horned toad by mail; they live on flies."

"Good by. Good luck."

The front door closed, sending a tinkling shiver through the crystals of the chandelier, and Edward Volkert, grotesque and irresponsible to the last, struck out upon the Sunset Trail with three odd shoes, a tooth mug, and a broken concertina; and a lighter heart never tricked a turnkey since Tubal Cain made iron bars.

Alida watched the cab drive away and noted that the plain clothes man was not in sight. Perhaps he had gone on ahead to the ferry.

* * * * *

Through the dimness of the Ruggles parlor, Chancellor De Vos looked sternly at the Lady with a Rose—attributed to Sully; the painted sloops of the Hudson River School lay idly becalmed. Wherever the cold light fell, it showed some frayed edge of the red rep furniture, disclosed some faded patch of carpet, some scratch upon the red mahogany doors.

Kenilworth Place is quiet in the morning, so quiet that one can hear the hoofs of horses on the asphalt as they turn the corner from Fifth Avenue. And now Alida heard them coming nearer, coming near; well broken horses stepping in unison, wonderful horses, bringing the tribute of the Cattle Trust, bringing the glory of the world, and the pride of life—and something more beside to which the rest was nothing. Slowly she crossed to the piano, and sitting down before it, touched the yellow keys.

"And have you been to Borderland?"

she sang.

"Some day together, hand in hand,
I'll take you there, to Borderland,
Beside the river I forget.
Some day when all our dreams come true,
One kiss for me and one—"

If Alida did not finish the song it was for a very good reason.

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